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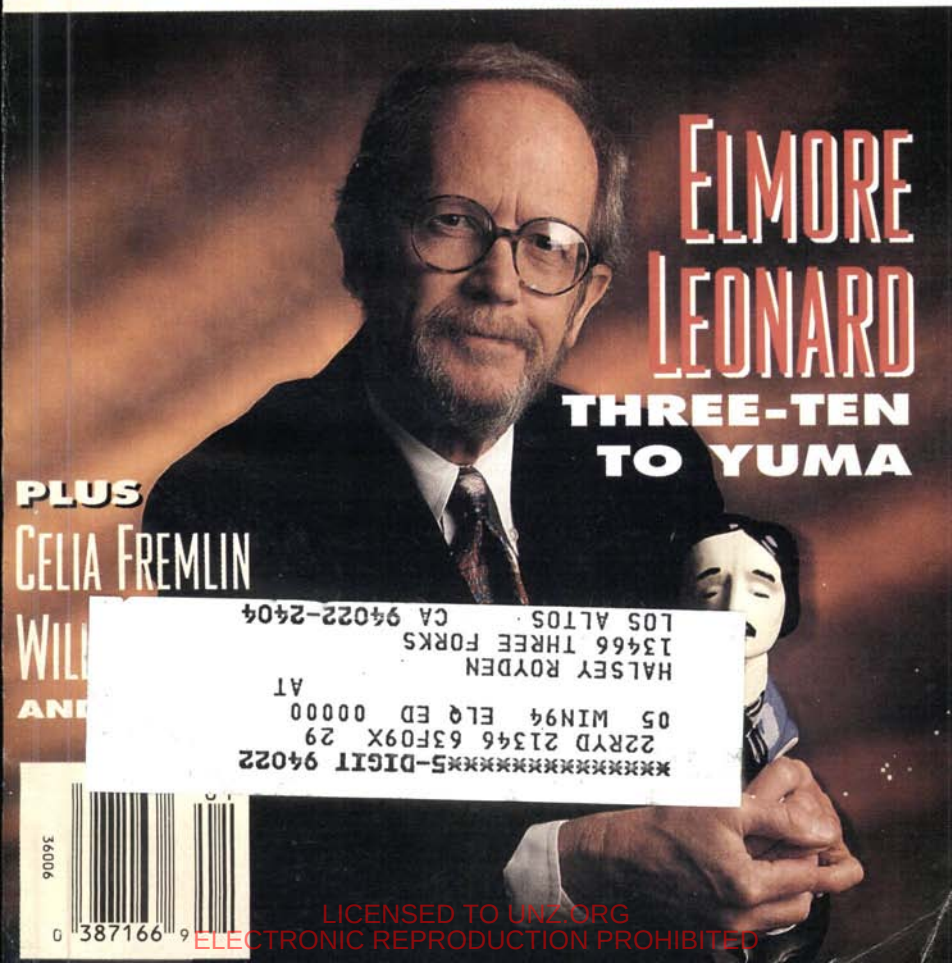
ELLERY QUEEN®

THE WORLD'S LEADING
MYSTERY MAGAZINE



ELMORE LEONARD
THREE-TEN TO YUMA

PLUS
CELIA FREMLIN
WILL
AND

HALSEY ROYDEN
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"We're looking for people

"Writing for children is the perfect way to begin," says the author of 53 children's books. "Your ideas come right out of your own experience. And while it's still a challenge, it's the straightest possible line between you and publication —if you're qualified to seek the success this rewarding field offers."

By Alvin Tresselt, *Dean of Faculty*

IF you want to write and get published, I can't think of a better way to do it than writing books and stories for children and teenagers. Ideas flow naturally right out of your own life experience. While it's still a challenge, the odds of getting that first unforgettable check from a juvenile publisher are better than they are from just about any other kind of publisher I know.

Later on, you may get checks from other publishers. But right now, the object is to begin—to break into print—to learn the feeling of writing and selling your work and seeing your name in type. After that, you can decide if you want your writing to take another direction.

But after 40 years of editing, publishing, and teaching—and 53 books of my own—I can tell you this: You'll go a long way before you discover anything as rewarding as writing for young readers.

The soaring children's market

Your words will never sound as sweet as they do from the lips of a child reading your books and stories. And the joy of creating books and stories that reach young people is an experience you'll never have anywhere else. But that's not all. The financial rewards go far beyond most people's expectations because there's a huge market out there for writers who are trained to tap it. Over $1.5 *billion* worth of children's books are purchased annually—some 4,000 different titles—many by new authors.

And over 400 children's magazines rely on freelancers to fill each issue.

Yet two big questions bedevil nearly every would-be writer: "Am I really qualified?" and "How can I get started?"

"Am I really qualified?"

This is our definition of a "qualified person": It's someone with an aptitude for writing who can take constructive criticism, learn from it, and turn it into a professional performance. That's the only kind of person we're looking for at the Institute of Children's Literature.® The reasons are simple: Our reputation is built on success, and if prospective students don't have the aptitude, we probably can't help them. And we tell them so. It's only fair to both of us.

To help us spot potential authors, we've developed a revealing test for writing aptitude. It's free, and we don't charge for our evaluation. But no one gets into the Institute without passing it. Those who pass receive our promise:

{ *You will complete at least one manuscript ready to submit to a publisher by the time you finish the course* }

One-on-one training with your own instructor

I've learned a lot about writing for children and I love it. Now I'm passing my knowledge on to my students so they can profit from it. When I'm not writing my own books I spend my time at the Institute, a workshop for writers that does one thing and does it better than any other educational institution I know of: It trains qualified people to write for the young reader.

This is the way I work with my students, and my fellow instructors—all of whom are experienced writers or editors —work more or less the same way.

When you're ready—at your own time

Alvin Tresselt, Dean of Faculty, was Executive Editor of Parents' Magazine Press, the first editor of *Humpty Dumpty's Magazine*, and a board member of the Author's Guild. His 53 books for young readers have sold over two million copies.

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to write children's books"

and your own pace—you send your assignment to me and I read it and I reread it to get everything out of it you've put into it. Then I edit your assignment with a well tempered pencil, just the way a publishing house editor would—if he had the time. I return it along with a detailed letter explaining my comments. I tell you what your strong points are, what your weaknesses are, and just what you can do to improve. It's a matter of push and pull with each assignment. You push and I pull and between us both, you learn to write.

The home of the Institute of Children's Literature, founded in 1969.

The proof of the pudding

This method really works. I wouldn't spend five minutes at it if it didn't. The proof of the pudding is that many students break into print even before they finish the course.

Connie Wooldridge, Philipsburg, PA, who has sold two stories to *Highlights for Children* says, "As an at-home mother of four, I have so appreciated the way the Institute is set up: it has provided me with the professional contact and guidance I needed to get a serious start as a writer without the hassles of babysitters, long drives, and hard deadlines."

"—finally...the support and direction I needed."

"The letter with the return of my first assignment was so kind and encouraging I started to cry," writes E.D. Mahr, Hinsdale, IL. "Here, finally, was the support and direction I needed."

Ken Fleming, Staten Island, NY who reports a sale to *Cricket* Magazine says, "To know that more than 120,000 children will be reading my words gives me a feeling of great satisfaction. Thank you all for giving me so much for so little."

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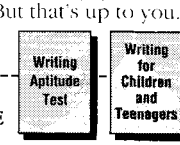

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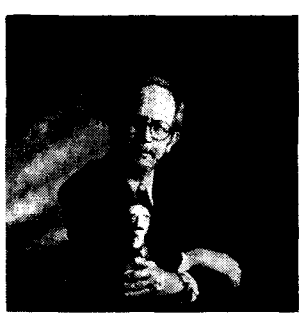

On our cover is
ELMORE LEONARD
(see page 155)

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Note: indicia on page 156

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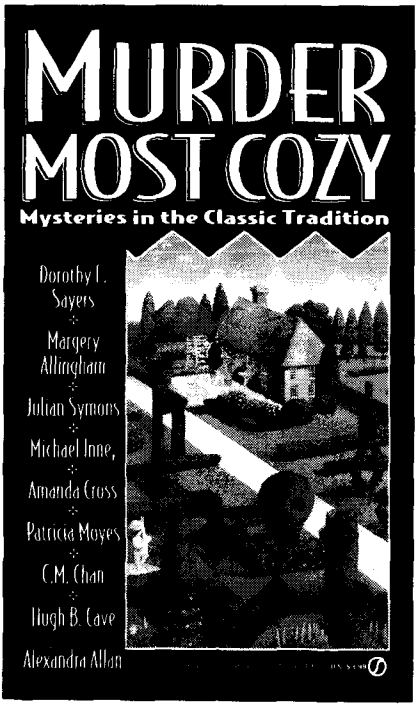
The butler wasn't the only one whodunit.

MURDER MOST COZY

Mysteries in the Classic Tradition



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a *NEW* short story by

CELIA FREMLIN

Speaking of the type of crime story she usually writes, Celia Fremlin says, "there are no policemen, no detectives, and (quite often) no murder; just some sort of mysterious threat hanging over someone and escalating . . ." (Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers). *It is a description that might be applied to this, her latest, short gem of suspense . . .*

ACCOMMODATION VACANT

by CELIA FREMLIN

"I'm sorry . . ." The woman's eyes slithered expertly down Linda's loose, figure-concealing coat, and her voice hardened. "No, I'm sorry, the room's been taken. . . . No, I've nothing left at all, I'm afraid. . . . Good afternoon. . . ."

Familiar enough words, by now. Goodness knows we ought to be used to it, thought Linda bitterly, as she and David trailed together down the grimy steps. She dared not even look up at him for comfort, lest he should see the tears stinging and glittering in her eyes.

But he had seen them anyway. His arm came round her thin shoulders, and for a moment they leaned together, speechless, in the grey, mean street, engulfed by a disappointment so intense, so totally shared, that one day, when they were old, old people, they might remember it as an extraordinary joy. . . .

"Lin—Lin, darling, don't cry! It'll be all right, I swear it will be all right! I promise you it will, Lin . . . !"

The despairing note in his young voice, the pressure of his arms round her, destroyed the last remnants of Linda's self-control. Burying her face against the worn leather of his jacket, she sobbed, helplessly and hopelessly.

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"It's my fault, David, it's all my fault!" she gulped, her voice muffled amid the luxuriance of his dark, shoulder-length hair. "It was my fault, it was me who talked you into it. You said all along we shouldn't start a baby yet, not until you've got a proper job. . . ."

At this, David jerked her sharply round to face him.

"Lin!" he said, "never, never say that again! I want this baby as much as you do, and if I ever said different, then forget it! He's *our* baby, yours and mine! I'm his father, and I want him! Get it? I *want* him! And I'm going to provide a home for him! A smashing home, too," he proclaimed defiantly into the dingy, uncaring street. "—A home fit for my son! Fit for my wife and son . . . !" His voice trailed off as he glared through the gathering November dusk at the closed doors, the tightly curtained windows, rank on rank, as far as they could see. "My God, if I could only get a decent job!" he muttered; and grabbing Linda's hand in a harsh, almost savage grip, he hurried her away—back to the main road, back to the lighted buses, back "home."

That's what they still called it anyway, though they both knew it wasn't home anymore. How could it be, when they had to steal in through the front door like burglars, closing it in a whisper behind them, going up the creaking stairs on tiptoe in the vain hope of avoiding Mrs. Moles, the landlady, with her guarded eyes and her twice-daily inquisitions: "Found anywhere yet? Oh. Oh, I see. Yes, well, I'm sorry, but I'm afraid I can't give you any more extension. Six months you've had (to the day, actually; Linda remembered in every detail that May morning when she had come back from the doctor's bubbling over with her glorious news, spilling it out, in reckless triumph, to everyone in the house). Six months, and I could have got you out in a week if I'd been minded! A week's notice, that's all I'd have to've given, it's not like you're on a regular tenancy! Six months I've given you, it's not everyone'd be that patient, I can tell you! But I've had enough! I'm giving you till Monday, understand? Not a day longer! I need that room. . . ."

Sometimes, during these tirades, David would answer back. Standing in front of Linda on the dark stairs, protecting her with his broad shoulders and his mass of tangled, caveman hair, he would storm at Mrs. Moles face-to-face, giving as good as he got; and Linda never told him that it only made matters worse for her afterwards. His male pride needed these shows of strength, she knew, especially now, when his temporary job at the Rating Office had come to an end, and the only money he could count on was from his part-time

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job at the cafeteria—three or four afternoons at most.

If only he had finished his course and got his engineering degree instead of dropping out half way!—Linda silenced the little stir of resentment, because what was the use? No good needling him *now* about his irresponsible past. Poor Dave, responsibility had caught up with him now, all right, and he was doing his best—his unpractised best—to shoulder it. Doing it for *her*. For her, and for the baby . . . recriminations don't help a man who is already stretched to his limit. Besides, she loved him.

Monday, though! Mrs. Moles really meant it this time! *Monday*—only four days away! That night, Linda cried herself to sleep, with David's arms around her and his voice, still shakily confident, whispering into her ear: "Don't you worry, Lin! It'll be all right. I promise you it'll be all right. . . ."

It wouldn't, though. How could it? They had been searching for months now, in all their free time and at weekends, lowering their standards week by week as the hopelessness of the search was gradually borne in on them. From a three-room flat to a two-room one . . . from one room with use of kitchen to anything, anything at all. . . . If all these weeks of unflagging effort had produced nothing, then what could possibly be hoped from four more days . . . ?

The next morning, for the first time since their search began, David set off for the estate agent's alone. After her near-sleepless night, Linda had woken feeling so sick, and looking so white and fragile, that David had insisted on her staying in bed—just as, a couple of weeks earlier, he had insisted on her giving up her job. Before he left, he brought her a cup of tea and kissed her goodbye.

"Don't worry, love, I'll come up with something *this* time, just you see!" And Linda, white and weak against the pillows, smiled and tried to look as if she didn't know that he was lying.

After he had gone, she must have dozed off, for the next thing she knew, it was past eleven o'clock, pale November sunshine was glittering on the wet windows, and the telephone down in the hall was ringing . . . ringing . . . ringing . . .

No one seemed to be answering. They must all be out. With a curious sense of foreboding (curious, because what bad news could there possibly be for a couple as near rock-bottom as herself and David?), Linda scrambled into dressing gown and slippers and hurried down the three flights of stairs.

"Darling! I thought you were never coming. . . ." It was Dave's voice all right, but for a moment she hadn't recognised it, so long

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was it since it had sounded buoyant and carefree like that— "Darling, listen! Just *listen*—you'll never believe it. . . ."

And she didn't. Not at first, anyway; it was just too fantastic; a stroke of luck beyond their wildest dreams! In those first moments, with the telephone pressed to her unbelieving ear, she couldn't seem even to take it in.

What had happened, she at last gathered, was this: David had been coming gloomily out of the estate agent's with the familiar "Nothing today, I'm afraid" still ringing in his ears, when a young man, red-haired and strikingly tall, had stepped across the pavement and accosted him.

"Looking for somewhere to live, buddy?" he'd asked; and before David had got over his surprise, the stranger was well and thoroughly launched on his amazing, incredible proposition.

A three-room flat, self-contained, with a balcony, and big windows facing south—all for five pounds a week!

"And he'd like us to move in *today!*" David gabbled joyously on, "Just think of it, Lin! *Today!* Not even one more night in that dump! No more grovelling to the old Mole! God, am I looking forward to telling her what she can do with that miserable garret. . . ."

"But . . . but, darling . . . !" Linda could not help breaking in at this point. "Darling, it sounds fantastic, of course it does! But . . . but, Dave, are you sure it's *all right?* I mean, why should this—whoever he is—why should he be letting the flat at such a ridiculously low rent? And—"

"Just what *I* wanted to know!" David's voice came clear and exultant down the line. "But it's quite simple really—he explained everything! You see, he's just broken up with his girl, she's gone off with another man, and he just can't stand staying on in the place without her. He's not thinking about the money, he just wants OUT—and you can understand it, can't you? I mean, he was nuts about this girl, they'd been together for over a year, and he thought she was just as happy as he was. The shock was just more than he could take. . . ."

"Yes . . . Yes, of course . . ." Linda's excitement was laced with unease. "But—David—I still don't quite understand. Why *us?* Why isn't he putting it in the hands of the agents . . . ?"

"Darling!"—there was just the tiniest edge of impatience in David's voice now—"Darling, don't be like that! Don't spoil it all! Anyway, it's all quite understandable, really. Just think for a minute. A chap in that sort of emotional crisis—the bottom just knocked out

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of his life—the last thing he needs is a lot of malarky about leases and tenancy agreements and date of transfer and all the rest of it. So he decided to bypass the whole estate agent racket and simply—"

"So what was he doing, then, just outside an estate agent's?"

The words had snapped out before Linda could check them. She hated her own wariness, her inability to throw herself with total abandon into David's mood of unquestioning exultation.

But this time David seemed to enjoy her hesitation: it was as if she had played, unwittingly, the very card that enabled him to lay down his ace.

"Aha!" he said—and already she could hear the smile in his voice—the bold, cheeky, self-congratulatory smile with which he used to relate the more outrageous exploits of that bunch of tear-aways he used to go around with—"*Aha*, that was cleverness! Real cleverness. Just the sort of thing that *I* might have thought of"—how wonderful it was to hear his cocky, male arrogance coming alive again after all these months of humiliation and defeat!—"He did just the thing that *I* always do in a tricky situation—he asked himself the right questions! Like, what's the quickest way to clinch a deal—any deal? Why, find a chap who's desperate for what you've got to offer. And when the thing on offer is a roof over the head—then where do such desperate chaps come thickest on the ground? Why, outside an estate agent's, just after opening time! So that's what he did—just hung about waiting for someone to come out the door looking really sick. . . ."

It made sense. Sense of a sort, anyway. Linda felt her doubts begin to melt. Joy hovered like a bright bird, ready to swoop in.

"It— Oh, darling! It seems just too good to be true!" she cried. "Oh, Dave, I'm so happy! And this young man—once we're settled, and you've got another job, we must insist on him taking more than five pounds—we mustn't take advantage of his misery! Not when *we're* so happy . . . so lucky . . . ! Oh, but we don't even know his name . . . !"

"We do! It's Fanshawe!" David countered exultantly. "It's on the name-slip outside the door—R. Fanshawe. But I've changed it, darling, I'm right here, and I've changed it already! It says 'Graves' now! 'David and Linda Graves'! Oh, Lin, darling, how soon can you get here . . . ?"

It was bigger even than she'd imagined, and much more beautiful. It was on the fifth floor of a large modern block, and even now, in winter, the big rooms were filled with light. The sunshine hit you

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like a breaking wave as you walked in, and through the wide windows, far away above the roofs and spires of the city, you could see a blue line of hills.

Linda and David could hardly speak for excitement. They wandered from room to room as if in a trance, exploring, exclaiming, making rapturous little sounds that were hardly like words at all; more like the twittering of birds in springtime, the joyous nesting time.

Deep, roomy shelves. Built-in cupboards and wardrobes. Bright, modern furniture—and not too much of it; there would be plenty of room for their own few favourite pieces.

"Your desk—it can go just here, Dave, under the window. It'll get all the light!" exclaimed Linda: and, "See, Lin, this alcove—I can build his cot to exactly fit in! This will be *his* room . . . !" and so on and so on, until at last, exhausted with happiness, one of them—afterwards, Linda could never remember which, and of course, at the time, it did not seem important—one of them suddenly noticed the time.

"Gosh, look, it's nearly two!" exclaimed whichever one it was; and there followed quite a little panic. For by two-thirty David was supposed to be at the cafeteria, slicing hard-boiled eggs, washing lettuces, sweeping up the mess left by the lunchtime customers. . . . It would never do for him to lose this job, too. Hand in hand they raced out of the flat . . . raced for the bus . . . and managed to reach home in time to get David out of his leather jacket and into a freshly ironed overall just in time to be not much more than ten minutes late for work. Kissing him goodbye, Linda was careful not to muss up his hastily smoothed hair—the curling, shoulder-length mane was a bone of contention at the cafeteria—as, indeed, it had been at all his other jobs—but *she* loved it.

At the door, he paused to urge her to rest while he was gone; to lie down and take things easy.

"You weren't too good this morning," he reminded her, "so whatever you do, don't start trying to do any packing—we'll do it this evening, together. Oh, darling, just imagine Mrs. M's face when she sees us bumping our suitcases down the stairs this very night! Monday, indeed! *I'll* give her Monday . . . !"

Obediently, after he'd gone, Linda pulled off her dress and shoes and climbed into bed. It was quite true, she *was* tired. For a few minutes she lay staring up at the ceiling, trying to realise that she was looking at those familiar cracks and stains for the very last

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time. She couldn't believe it, really; the change in their fortunes had been so swift, so dreamlike somehow, that she hadn't really taken it in.

"Rest," David had urged her, but it was impossible. Excitement was drumming in her veins; it was impossible to be still, with all this happiness surging about inside her. She must *do* something. Not the packing—she'd promised to wait for David before starting on that—but there'd be no harm in getting things sorted out a bit . . . get rid of some of the rubbish. Those torn-off pages of Accommodation to Let, for a start: they'd never need *those* again . . . !"

Clumsily—for she was nearly eight months gone now—she heaved herself off the bed, and as she did so, David's leather jacket, hastily flung aside when he'd changed for work, cascaded off the bed onto the floor, with a little tinkling, metallic scutter of sound.

The keys, of course. The keys of the new flat: and as she picked them off the floor, Linda was filled with a surge of impatience to see again her beautiful new home—"home" already, as this place had never been. She ached to look once more out of the wide, beautiful windows, to gloat over the space, the light, and the precious feeling that it was *hers!* Hers and David's, and the new baby's as well! She wanted to examine, at leisure and in detail, every drawer and cupboard; to make plans about where the polished wooden salad bowl was to go, and the Israeli dancing girl . . . and the books . . . and the records . . .

Well, and why not? The whole afternoon stretched ahead of her—David wouldn't be home till nine at the earliest. What was she waiting for?

The flat did not seem, this time, quite the palace of light and space that it had seemed that morning, but it was still very wonderful. The rooms were dimmer now, and greyer, because, naturally, the sun had moved round since this morning, and left them in shadow.

But Linda did not mind. It was still marvellous. Humming to herself softly, she wandered, lapped in happiness, from room to room, peering into cupboards, scrutinizing shelves and alcoves, planning happily where everything was to go.

What space! What lovely, lovely space! Opening yet another set of empty, inviting drawers, it occurred to Linda that, for a man with a broken heart, their predecessor had left things quite extraordinarily clean and tidy. In the turmoil of shock and grief, how on earth had he forced himself to clean up so thoroughly—even to Hoover

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the carpets, and dust out the empty drawers? Or maybe the defecting girlfriend had done it for him? A sort of guilt-offering to assuage her conscience . . . ?

Musing thus, Linda came upon a cupboard she had not noticed before—it was half-hidden by a big, well-cushioned armchair pulled in front of it. It looked as if it might be big enough to store all the things for the new baby. . . . Linda took hold of the handle and pulled—and straightaway she knew that it was locked. This, then, must be where the ultra-tidy Mr. Fanshawe had stored away his things? Spurred by curiosity, Linda tried first one and then another of the keys on the bunch David had been given—and at the third attempt, the door gave under her hand. Gave too readily, somehow. It was as if it was being pushed from inside . . . a great weight seemed to be on the move . . . and just as the fear reached her stomach, making it lurch within her, the door swung fully open, and the body of a girl slumped out onto the floor. A blonde girl; probably pretty, but there was no knowing now, so pinched and sunken were the features, already mottled with death.

Linda stood absolutely still. Horror, yes. In her recollections afterwards, and in her dreams, horror was the emotion she remembered most clearly. And what could be more natural?

But not at the time. At the time, in those very first seconds, before she had had time to think at all, it was not horror that had overwhelmed her at all, it was fury. Sickening, stupefying fury and disappointment.

"Damn you, damn you, damn you!" she sobbed, crazily, at the silent figure on the floor. "I *knew* it was too good to be true! I *knew* there would be a snag . . . !" And it was the sound of her own voice, raised in such blind, self-centered misery, that brought her partially to her senses.

She must *do* something. Phone somebody. Scream "Murder!" out of the window. Get help.

Help with what? How can you help a girl who is already dead . . . ? With the strange, steely calm that comes with shock, Linda dropped to her knees and peered closely at the slumped, deathly figure. No breath stirred between the bluish lips; no pulse could be felt in the limp, icy wrist. The girl lay there lifeless as a bundle of old clothes, ruining everything.

Because, of course, the flat was lost to them now. Had, in fact, never been theirs to lose. The whole thing had been a trick, right from the beginning. What they had walked into, so foolishly and

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trustingly, was not a flat at all, but a dreadful crime. Presently, the police would be here, cordoning everything off, hunting down the real owner of the flat, bringing him back for questioning. They would be questioning herself and David, too. . . . That, of course, had been the whole point of the trick! Linda could see it all now. They had been lured here deliberately by the phoney offer of a home, in order that they should leave their fingerprints all over the place and be found here when the police arrived. A pair of trespassers, roaming without permission or explanation around someone else's flat! Because that's how it would look: why should the police—or indeed any other sane person—believe such a cock-and-bull story as she and David would have to tell? A ridiculous, incredible tale about having been offered, by a total stranger, an attractive three-room flat in a pleasant neighbourhood for only five pounds a week. All that this Fanshawe man had to do now was to deny totally the encounter with David outside the estate agent's, and it would be his word against David's—with, to him, the overwhelming advantage that his denials would sound immeasurably more plausible than David's grotesque assertions!

Neat, really. "*Aha,* that was cleverness!" as David had so lightheartedly remarked, only a few hours ago!

At the thought of all that happiness—of David's pride, his triumph, all to be so short-lived—a cold fury of determination seized upon Linda's still-shocked brain, and she knew, suddenly, exactly what she must do.

The dead cannot suffer. They are beyond human aid, and beyond human injury, too; so it wasn't really so terrible, what she was going to do.

Cautiously, and without even any great distaste, so numbed was she with shock, Linda got hold of the limp figure by the thick polo-neck of its woollen sweater and began to pull.

Luckily, at this dead hour of the afternoon, the long corridors were empty as a dream. The lift glided obediently, silently downwards with its terrible burden . . . down, down, past the entrance floor, past even the basement . . . down, down to the lowest depths of all . . . and there, in an icy, windowless cellar, stacked with old mattresses and shadowy lengths of piping, Linda left her terrible charge.

It would be found—of course it would be found—but now there would at least be a sporting chance that the clues—now so thoroughly scrambled—would no longer lead so inexorably to the fifth-

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floor flat into which the new tenants had just moved. It would be just one more of those unsolved murders. There were dozens of them every year, weren't there?

It would be all right. It *must* be all right. It must, it must . . .

All the same, Linda couldn't get out of the beautiful flat fast enough that afternoon. While the grey November day faded—she dared not switch on any lights for fear of advertising her presence here—she pushed the big chair back in front of the cupboard again, and set the room to rights. Then, still trembling, and feeling deathly sick, she set off for home. It was only five o'clock: four whole hours in which to recover her composure before David got back from work.

And recover it she must. At any cost, David must be protected from all knowledge of this new and terrible turn of events. She recalled his triumphant happiness this morning, the resurgence of his masculine pride. . . . She pictured how he would come bounding up the stairs this evening, three at a time, carrying a bottle of wine, probably, to celebrate. . . .

And celebrate they would, if it killed her! Not one word would she breathe of her fearful secret—not one flicker of anxiety would she allow to cross her face.

Celebrate! Celebrate! Candles; steak and mushrooms, even if it cost all the week's housekeeping! She would wash and set her hair, too, as soon as she got in, and change into the peacock-blue maternity smock with the Chinese-y neckline. . . . She thought of everything, hurrying home through the November dusk that evening, except the possibility that David would be in before her. . . .

She stood in the doorway clutching her parcels, speechless with surprise, and staring at him.

"Where the hell have you been?"

Never had she heard his voice sound so angry. How long had he been here? Why had he come back so early . . . ?

"I said you were to *rest!*" he was shouting at her. "You promised me you'd stay here and rest! Where have you *been?* I've been out of my mind with worry! And where are the keys? The keys of the flat? They were here . . . in my pocket . . . !"

He was sorry, though, a minute later; when she'd handed over the keys, and had explained to him about her excitement, about the sudden, irresistible impulse to go and look at the beautiful new flat once more. He seemed to understand.

"I'm sorry, darling, I've been a brute!" he apologized. "But you see it was so scary, somehow, coming in and finding the place all dark

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and empty! I was afraid something had happened. I thought, maybe, the baby . . ."

The reconciliation was sweet: and if he questioned her a little over-minutely about her exact movements that afternoon, and exactly how she had found things in the flat—well, what could be more natural in a man thrilled to bits about his new home, into which he is going to move that very night?

And move that very night they did.

No more Mrs. Moles! No more tiptoeing guiltily up and down dark stairs! Everywhere, light and space and privacy! And on top of this, a brand-new, modern kitchen, and a little sunny room exactly right for the baby—only a month away he was, now! For a day or so, Linda had feared that the birth might be coming on prematurely; she had been having odd, occasional pains since dragging that awful weight hither and thither along cement floors, through shadowy doorways. But after a few days it all seemed to settle down again—as also, amazingly, did her mind and spirits.

At first, she had been full of guilt and dread: it was all she could do not to let David notice how she started at every footfall in the corridor . . . every soft moan from the lift doors as they closed and opened. Sometimes, too, she was aware—or imagined she was aware—of David's eyes on her, speculative, unsmiling. At such times she would hastily find occasion to laugh shrilly . . . clatter saucepans . . . talk about the baby . . . Anything.

But presently, as the days went by, and nothing happened, her nerves began to quieten. Indeed, there were times when she almost wondered whether she hadn't imagined the whole thing. Because there was nothing in the papers, nothing on the radio—though she'd listened, during those first few days, like a maniac, like a creature obsessed, switching on every hour on the hour.

Nothing. Nothing at all. Had the body, conceivably, not been found yet? Surely it was *someone's* business—caretaker, night-watchman, or someone—to go into that cellar now and again. Or—was it possible that the murderer himself had discovered where it had been moved to—had, perhaps, even watched her moving it, from some hidden vantage point . . . ? The lift, the corridors had all *seemed* to be totally deserted, but you never knew. . . .

To begin with, weighed down as she was by guilt and dread, Linda had tried as far as possible to avoid contact with the neighbours; but inevitably, as the days went by, she found herself becoming on speaking terms with first one and then another of them. The woman

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next door . . . the old man at the end of the corridor . . . the girl who always seemed to be watering the rubber plant on the second-floor landing. Bits of gossip came to her ears, of tenants past and present, including, of course, snippets of information about hers and David's predecessor in the flat. . . . And slowly, inexorably, it was borne in on her that practically none of it fitted with David's story in the very least degree. The previous tenant had been neither red-haired nor tall—hadn't, in fact, been a man at all, but a woman. A young, blonde woman, Linda learned, who had rather kept herself to herself. . . . Oh, there's been goings-on, yes, but there, you have to live and let live, don't you? Quite a surprise, actually, when the young woman gave up the flat so suddenly, no one had heard a thing about it, but there you are, the young folk are very unpredictable these days. . . .

And it was now, for the very first time, that it dawned on Linda that she only had David's word for it that the bizarre and improbable encounter with "Mr. Fanshawe" had ever taken place at all. Or, indeed, that any "Mr. Fanshawe" had ever existed!

This terrible, traitorous thought slipped into her mind one early December evening as she sat sewing for her baby. And having slipped in, it seemed, instantly, to make itself horribly at home . . . as if, deep down in her brain, there had been a niche ready-prepared for it all along.

Because everything now slid hideously, inexorably into place: David's disproportionate anger when he found she had visited the flat by herself that first afternoon: his unexplained, mysteriously early return from work on that same occasion. Perhaps, instead of going to the cafeteria, he had slipped off that working overall the moment he was out of sight and gone rushing off to devise some means of disposing of the body: his preparations completed, he would have arrived at the flat, scared and breathless—to find that the body had already disappeared! What then? Bewildered and panic-stricken, he would have hurried home—only to find that she, Linda, had been to the flat ahead of him! Had he guessed that she must have found the body? And if so, what had he made of her silence all these days? What did he think she was thinking as she sat there, demure and smiling, evening after evening, sewing for the baby? No wonder he had been giving her dark, wary glances! What sort of a look would it be that he'd be giving her tonight, when he came in and saw the new, terrible fear in her eyes, the suspicion flickering in her face and in her voice?

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Suspicion? No! No! She *didn't* suspect him—how could she? Not *David!* Not her own husband, the man she loved! How *could* she, even for an instant, have imagined that he might be capable of . . . !

Well, and what *is* a man capable of? A proud, headstrong young man who not so long ago was the daredevil leader of the most venturesome teenage gang in his neighbourhood? To what sort of lengths *could* such a young man go, under the intolerable lash of humiliation? He, who had set out in proud and youthful arrogance to conquer the world, and now finds he cannot even provide any sort of home for his wife and child? Such a young man—*could* he, in such extremities of shattered pride and of self-respect destroyed—*could* he simply walk into a strange flat, murder the occupant, and coolly take possession . . . ?

And even if he couldn't—couldn't, and hadn't, and never would—what then? What about *her?* How could she, having once let the awful suspicion cross her mind, ever face him again? How was she to behave . . . look . . . when he came in from work tonight? What sort of supper should one cook for a suspected murderer . . . ?

And as she sat there, crouched in the beautiful flat, while outside the evening darkened into night, she heard the soft whine of the lift—the opening and closing of its doors.

And next—although it was only a little after five, and David shouldn't be home till nine—next there came, unmistakably, the sound of the key in the door.

Afterwards, Linda could never remember what exactly had been the sequence of her thoughts. *Why?* had been one of them, certainly—*Why* is he arriving home so early?—and then, swift upon the heels of this, had come the blind, unreasoning panic. . . . What is he *doing* out there? Why doesn't he come right in . . . shut the front door behind him? Why isn't he calling, "Lin, darling, I'm back," the way he always does? Why is he being so quiet, so furtive . . . ? Lurking out there . . . standing stock still, to judge by the silence . . .

But after that, in Linda's jumbled memory, all was confusion. Had she recognised the blonde girl at once—so different as she now looked—or had there been several minutes of stunned incomprehension as they gaped at one another in the little hall, all at cross-purposes in their questions and ejaculations?

Because, of course, this was the rightful tenant of the flat, Rosemary Fanshawe by name; as astounded (on her return from a stay in hospital and a fortnight's convalescence) to find a strange girl in possession of her flat as Linda was at this sudden invasion by a

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stranger. Linda could never remember, afterwards, who it was who finally made coffee for whom, or in what order each had explained herself to the other; but in the end—and certainly by the time David got back at nine o'clock—all had been made clear, and a sort of bewildered friendship was already in the making.

For this bright, well-groomed girl was indeed the same that Linda had found and taken for dead; and there had indeed been a terrible lovers' quarrel, just as the red-haired young man outside the estate agent's had affirmed. What he had told David hadn't been a lie, exactly; rather a sort of mirror image of the truth, with all the facts in reverse. Thus it had been he, not Rosemary, who had ended the relationship: it had been her heart, not his, that was broken. It was she, not he, who had declared that she couldn't bear to stay in the flat for so much as another day. Hysterically, she had flung her things into cases . . . ordered a car to take them to a friend's house . . . and then, in less than an hour, had returned, half-crazy with grief and fury, to storm at him for not having tried to prevent her going. There had been a final, terrible quarrel, at the climax of which Rosemary had threatened dramatically to take a whole bottle of sleeping pills. Enraged by this bit of melodramatic blackmail (as he judged it), the red-haired boyfriend—Martin by name—had slammed out of the flat; but later, growing scared, he had crept back, and found to his horror that she really *had* taken the pills, and was lying—dead, as he thought—on the floor. (Actually, as they'd explained to Rosemary in the hospital, she'd only been in a deep coma, but a layman could not be expected to realise this, as both breath and pulse would be too faint to be discerned.) Appalled—and terrified at the thought that he might be blamed—Martin had bundled the "body" out of sight in the nearest cupboard, and set himself frantically to cleaning up the flat and removing all traces of their joint lives. All night it had taken him; and while he packed and scrubbed, his brain had been afire with desperate schemes for shuffling off the responsibility—preferably onto some anonymous outsider—while he, Martin, got clean away. By the time morning came, and his task was finished, his plans were also ready; he washed, shaved, and off he went to the estate agent . . .

And in fact, it all worked out much as he had hoped—with the fortunate addition that, as it turned out, it was probably Linda's action in dragging the "body" down to the basement that had saved Rosemary's life—the jolting, the knocking-about, and the icy chill of the cellar had prevented the coma becoming so deep as to be

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irreversible. That same night, she had recovered consciousness sufficiently to stagger out into the deserted street and wander some way before being picked up and taken to hospital.

And David, when he came home and heard the whole story? He was unsurprised. David was no fool, and he had realised right from the start (despite his show of bravado) that there was something very phoney indeed about that offer outside the estate agent's, but had decided (being the kind of young man he was) to gamble on the chance of being able to cope with the tricksters, whatever it was they were up to, when the time came. However, with his mind full of the possible hazards of the venture, he had naturally been thrown into a complete panic by the discovery that Linda had gone off alone that first afternoon into what might well prove to be a trap of some kind; and even after his immediate fears had been set at rest, he had not failed to notice, in the succeeding days, that Linda was oppressed and ill-at-ease. He knew nothing, of course, about the "body," but he could see very well that there was something. . . .

Now, he shrugged. He'd gambled and lost before in his short life.

"Oh, well. It's back on the road for us, then, Linda my pet," he said, reaching out his hand towards her . . . but at that same moment Rosemary gave a squeal as if she'd been trodden on.

"Oh *no!* Not *yet!* Oh, *please!*" she cried. "I can't possibly stay on in the flat by myself, I *must* have someone to share, now that . . ."

Of course, it wasn't quite the same as having the place to themselves; but it was much, much better than living at Mrs. Moles's. And for Rosemary, likewise, it wasn't quite the same as having Martin there; but it was much, much better than having to pay the whole of the rent herself. She found, too, that she enjoyed the company; and when, soon after his son was born, David resumed his engineering studies and began bringing friends home from college, she found she enjoyed it even more.

"Wasn't it lucky that I took those pills just when I did?" she mused dreamily one evening, after the reluctant departure of one of the handsomer of the embryo engineers; and Linda, settling her baby back in his cot, had to agree that it was.

Indeed, when you thought of all the ways the thing *might* have ended, "lucky" seemed something of an understatement.

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For a picture of a Scotland the tourist never sees, we introduce mystery writer Ian Rankin. Mr. Rankin is currently studying in the United States as a recipient of the Raymond Chandler Award, but like the hero of his novels and stories, Inspector John Rebus, he makes his home in Edinburgh. The Rebus novels (including Knots & Crosses, *published in the United States by Doubleday) have been described as "exemplary" (The London Times), "gripping and sinister" (The London Independent), and "compelling" (The Kirkus Reviews). What better way to bring in the New Year for* EQMM *than with a tale set in the city in which the holiday enjoys its most exuberant celebration . . .*

AULD LANG SYNE

by IAN RANKIN

Places Detective Inspector John Rebus did not want to be at midnight on Hogmanay: number one, the Tron in Edinburgh.

Which was perhaps, Rebus decided, why he found himself at five minutes to midnight pushing his way through the crowds that thronged the area of the Royal Mile outside the Tron Kirk. It was a bitter night, a night filled with the fumes of beer and whisky, of foam licking into the sky as another can was opened, of badly sung songs and arms around necks and stooped, drunken proclamations of undying love, proclamations which would be forgotten by morning.

Rebus had been here before, of course. He had been here at midnight on Hogmanay, ready to root out the eventual troublemakers, to break up fights and crunch across the shattered glass covering the cobblestones. The best and worst of the Scots came out as another New Year approached: the togetherness, the sharpness, the hugging of life, the inability to know when to stop, so that the hug became a smothering stranglehold. These people were drowning in a sea of sentiment and sham. "Flower of Scotland" was struck up by a lone voice for the thousandth time, and for the thousandth time a few

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more voices joined in, all falling away at the end of the first chorus.

"Gawn yirsel there, big man."

Rebus looked around him. The usual contingent of uniformed officers was going through the annual ritual of having hands shaken by a public suddenly keen to make friends. It was the WPCs Rebus felt sorry for, as another slobbering kiss slapped into the cheek of a young female officer. The police of Edinburgh knew their duty: they always offered one sacrificial lamb to appease the multitude. There was actually an orderly queue standing in front of the WPC waiting to kiss her. She smiled and blushed. Rebus shivered and turned away. Four minutes to midnight. His nerves were like struck chords. He hated crowds. Hated drunken crowds more. Hated the fact that another year was coming to an end. He began to push through the crowd with a little more force than was necessary.

People Detective Inspector John Rebus would rather not be with at midnight on Hogmanay: number one, detectives from Glasgow CID.

He smiled and nodded towards one of them. The man was standing just inside a bus shelter, removed from the general scrum of the road itself. On top of the shelter, a Mohican in black leather did a tribal dance, a bottle of strong lager gripped in one hand. A police constable shouted for the youth to climb down from the shelter. The punk took no notice. The man in the bus shelter smiled back at John Rebus. He's not waiting for a bus, Rebus thought to himself, he's waiting for a bust.

Things Detective Inspector John Rebus would rather not be doing at midnight on Hogmanay: number one, working.

So he found himself working, and as the crowd swept him up again, he thought of Dante's *Inferno*. Three minutes to midnight. Three minutes away from hell. The Scots, pagan at their core, had always celebrated New Year rather than Christmas. Back when Rebus was a boy, Christmases were muted. New Year was the time for celebration, for first-footing, black bun, madeira cake, coal wrapped in silver foil, stovies during the night and steak pie the following afternoon. Ritual after ritual. Now he found himself observing another ritual, another set of procedures. A meeting was about to take place. An exchange would be made: a bag filled with money for a parcel full of dope. A consignment of heroin had entered Scotland via a west-coast fishing village. The CID in Glasgow had been tipped off but failed to intercept the package. The trail had gone cold for several days, until an informant came up with the vital

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information. The dope was in Edinburgh. It was about to be handed on to an east-coast dealer. The dealer was known to Edinburgh CID, but they'd never been able to pin a major possession charge on him. They wanted him badly. So did the west-coast CID.

"It's to be a joint operation," Rebus's boss had informed him, with no trace of irony on his humourless face. So now here he was, mingling with the crowds, just as another dozen or so undercover officers were doing. The men about to make the exchange did not trust one another. One of them had decided upon the Tron as a public enough place to make the deal. With so many people around, a double cross was less likely to occur. The Tron at midnight on Hogmanay: a place of delirium and riot. No one would notice a discreet switch of cases, money for dope, dope for money. It was perfect.

Rebus, pushing against the crowd again, saw the money-man for the very first time. He recognised him from photographs. Alan Lyons, "Nal" to his friends. He was twenty-seven years old, drove a Porsche 911, and lived in a detached house on the riverside just outside Haddington. He had been one of Rab Philips's men until Philips's demise. Now he was out on his own. He listed his occupation as "entrepreneur." He was sewerage.

Lyons was resting his back against a shop window. He smoked a cigarette and gave the passersby a look that said he was not in the mood for handshakes and conversation. A glance told Rebus that two of the Glasgow crew were keeping a close watch on Lyons, so he did not linger. His interest now was in the missing link, the man with the package. Where was he? A countdown was being chanted all around him. A few people reckoned the New Year was less than ten seconds away; others, checking their watches, said there was a minute left. By Rebus's own watch, they were already into the New Year by a good thirty seconds. Then, without warning, the clock chimes rang and a great cheer went up. People were shaking hands, hugging, kissing. Rebus could do nothing but join in.

"Happy New Year."

"Happy New Year, pal."

"Best of luck, eh?"

"Happy New Year."

"All the best."

"Happy New Year."

Rebus shook a Masonic hand, and looked up into a face he recognised. He returned the compliment—"Happy New Year"—and the man smiled and moved on, hand already outstretched to another

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well-wisher, another stranger. But this man had been no stranger to Rebus. Where the hell did he know him from? The crowd had rearranged itself, shielding the man from view. Rebus concentrated on the memory of the face. He had known it younger, less jowly, but with darker eyes. He could hear the voice: a thick Fife accent. The hands were like shovels, miner's hands, but this man was no miner.

He had his radio with him, but trapped as he was in the midst of noise, there was no point trying to contact the others on the surveillance. He wanted to tell them something. He wanted to tell them he was going to follow the mystery man. Always supposing, that was, he could find him again in the crowd.

And then he remembered: Jackie Crawford. Dear God, it was Jackie Crawford!

People Rebus did not want to shake hands with as the old year became the new: number one, Jackie "Trigger" Crawford.

Rebus had put Crawford behind bars four years ago for armed robbery and wounding. The sentence imposed by the judge had been a generous stretch of ten years. Crawford had headed north from court in a well-guarded van. He had not gained the nickname "Trigger" for his quiet and homely outlook on life. The man was a head-case of the first order, gun-happy and trigger-happy. He'd taken part in a series of bank and building society robberies; short, violent visits to High Streets across the Lowlands. That nobody had been killed owed more to strengthened glass and luck than to Crawford's philanthropy. He'd been sent away for ten, he was out after four. What was going on? Surely, the man could not be out and walking the streets *legally?* He had to have broken out, or at the very least cut loose from some day-release scheme. And wasn't it a coincidence that he should bump into Rebus, that he should be here in the Tron at a time when the police were waiting for some mysterious drug peddler?

Rebus believed in coincidence, but this was stretching things a bit too far. Jackie Crawford was somewhere in this crowd, somewhere shaking hands with people whom, a scant four years before, he might have been terrorising with a sawn-off shotgun. Rebus had to do something, whether Crawford was the "other man" or not. He began squeezing through the crowd again, this time ignoring proffered hands and greetings. He moved on his toes, craning his head over the heads of the revellers, seeking the square-jawed, wiry-haired head of his prey. He was trying to recall whether there was some tradition in Scotland that ghosts from your past came to haunt

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you at midnight on Hogmanay. He thought not. Besides, Crawford was no ghost. His hands had been meaty and warm, his thumb pressing speculatively against Rebus's knuckles. The eyes which had glanced momentarily into Rebus's eyes had been clear and blue, but uninterested.

Had Crawford recognised his old adversary? Rebus couldn't be sure. There had been no sign of recognition, no raising of eyebrows or opening of the mouth. Just three mumbled words before moving on to the next hand. Was Crawford drunk? Most probably: few sane and sober individuals visited the Tron on this night of all nights. Good; a drunken Crawford would have been unlikely to recognise him. Yet the voice had been quiet and unslurred, the eyes focussed. Crawford had not seemed drunk, had not acted drunk. Sober as a judge, in fact. This, too, worried Rebus.

But then, *everything* worried him this evening. He couldn't afford any slip-ups from the operation's Edinburgh contingent. It would give too much ammo to the Glasgow faction: there was a certain competitive spirit between the two forces. For "competitive spirit" read "loathing." Each would want to claim any arrest as *its* victory; and each would blame any foul-up on the other.

This had been explained to him very clearly by Chief Inspector Lauderdale.

"But surely, sir," Rebus had replied, "catching these men is what's most important."

"Rubbish, John," Lauderdale had replied. "What's important is that we don't look like arseholes in front of McLeish and his men."

Which, of course, Rebus had already known; he just liked winding his superior up a little the better to watch him perform. Superintendent Michael McLeish was an outspoken and devout Catholic, and Rebus's chief did not like Catholics. But Rebus hated bigots, and so he wound up Lauderdale whenever he could and had a name for him behind his back: the Clockwork Orangeman.

The crowd was thinning out as Rebus headed away from the Tron and uphill towards the castle. He was, he knew, moving away from the surveillance and should inform his fellow officers of the fact, but if his hunch was right, he was also following the man behind the whole deal. Suddenly he caught sight of Crawford, who seemed to be moving purposefully out of the crowd, heading onto the pavement and giving a half-turn of his head, knowing he was being followed.

So he had recognised Rebus, and now had seen him hurrying after him. The policeman exhaled noisily and pushed his way through

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the outer ring of the celebrations. His arms ached, as though he had been swimming against a strong current, but now that he was safely out of the water, he saw that Crawford had vanished. He looked along the row of shops, separated each from the other by narrow, darkened closes. Up those closes were the entrances to flats, courtyards surrounded by university halls of residence, and many steep and worn steps leading from the High Street down to The Mound. Rebus had to choose one of them. If he hesitated, or made the wrong choice, Crawford would make good his escape. He ran to the first alley and, glancing down it, listening for footsteps, decided to move on. At the second close, he chose not to waste any more time and ran in, passing dimly lit doorways festooned with graffiti, dank walls, and frozen cobbles. Until, launching himself down a flight of steps into almost absolute darkness, he stumbled. He flailed for a handrail to stop him from falling, and found his arm grabbed by a powerful hand, saving him.

Crawford was standing against the side of the alley, on a platform between flights of steps. Rebus sucked in air, trying to calm himself. There was a sound in his ears like the aftermath of an explosion.

"Thanks," he spluttered.

"You were following me." The voice was effortlessly calm.

"Was I?" It was a lame retort and Crawford knew it. He chuckled.

"Yes, Mr. Rebus, you were. You must have gotten a bit of a shock."

Rebus nodded. "A bit, yes, after all these years, Jackie."

"I'm surprised you recognised me. People tell me I've changed."

"Not that much." Rebus glanced down at his arm, which was still in Crawford's viselike grip. The grip relaxed and fell away.

"Sorry."

Rebus was surprised at the apology, but tried not to let it show. He was busy covertly studying Crawford's body, looking for any bulge big enough to be a package or a gun.

"So what were you doing back there?" he asked, not particularly interested in the answer, but certainly interested in the time it might buy him.

Crawford seemed amused. "Bringing in the New Year, of course. What else would I be doing?"

It was a fair question, but Rebus chose not to answer it. "When did you get out?"

"A month back." Crawford could sense Rebus's suspicion. "It's legit. Honest to God, Sergeant, as He is my witness. I haven't done a runner or anything."

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"You ran from *me*. And it's Inspector now, by the way."

Crawford smiled again. "Congratulations."

"Why did you run?"

"Was I running?"

"You know you were."

"The reason I was running was because the last person I wanted to see tonight of all nights was you, Inspector Rebus. You spoilt it for me."

Rebus frowned. He was *looking* at Trigger Crawford, but felt he was talking to somebody else, someone calmer and less dangerous, someone, well, *ordinary*. He was confused, but still suspicious. "Spoilt what exactly?"

"My New Year resolution. I came here to make peace with the world."

It was Rebus's turn to smile, though not kindly. "Make peace, eh?"

"That's right."

"No more guns? No more armed robberies?"

Crawford was shaking his head slowly. Then he held open his coat. "No more shooters, Inspector. That's a promise. You see, I've made my own peace."

Peace or piece? Rebus couldn't be sure. He was reaching into his own jacket pocket, from which he produced a police radio. Crawford looked on the level. He even sounded on the level, but facts had to be verified. So he called in and asked for a check to be made on John Crawford, nickname "Trigger." Crawford smiled shyly at the mention of that name. Rebus held onto the radio, waiting for the computer to do its stuff, waiting for the station to respond.

"It's been a long time since anyone called me Trigger," Crawford said. "Quite some time."

"How come they released you after four?"

"A bit less than four, actually," corrected Crawford. "They released me because I was no longer a threat to society. You'll find that hard to believe. In fact, you'll find it *impossible* to believe. That's not my fault, it's yours. You think men like me can never go straight. But we can. You see, something happened to me in prison. I found Jesus Christ."

Rebus knew the look on his face was a picture, and it caused Crawford to smile again, still shyly. He looked down at the tips of his shoes.

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"That's right, Inspector. I became a Christian. It wasn't any kind of blinding light. It took a while. I got bored inside and I started reading books. One day I picked up the Bible and just opened it at random. What I read there seemed to make sense. It was the Good News Bible, written in plain English. I read bits and pieces, just flicked through it. Then I went to one of the Sunday services, mainly because there were a few things I couldn't understand and I wanted to ask the minister about them. And he helped me a bit. That's how it started. It changed my life."

Rebus could think of nothing to say. He thought of himself as a Christian, too, a sceptical Christian, a little like Crawford himself perhaps. Full of questions that needed answering. No, this couldn't be right. He was *nothing* like Crawford. Nothing at all like him. Crawford was an animal; his kind never changed. Did they? Just because he had never met a "changed man," did that mean such a thing did not exist? After all, he'd never met the queen or the prime minister either. The radio crackled to life in his hand.

"Rebus here," he said, and then listened.

It was all true. The details from Crawford's file were being read to him. Model prisoner. Bible class. Recommended for early release. Personal tragedy.

"Personal tragedy?" Rebus looked at Crawford.

"Ach, my son died. He was only in his twenties."

Rebus, having heard enough, had already switched off the radio. "I'm sorry," he said. Crawford just shrugged, shrugged shoulders beneath which were tucked no hidden shotguns, and slipped his hands into his pockets, pockets where no pistols lurked. But Rebus held out a hand towards him.

"Happy New Year," he said.

Crawford stared at the hand, then brought out his own right hand. The two men shook warmly, their grips firm.

"Happy New Year," said Crawford. Then he glanced back up the close. "Look, Inspector, if it's all right with you, I think I'll go back up the Tron. It was daft of me to run away in the first place. There are plenty of hands up there I've not shaken yet."

Rebus nodded slowly. He understood now. For Crawford, the New Year was something special, a new start in more ways than one. Not everyone was given that chance.

"Aye," he said. "On you go."

Crawford had climbed three steps before he paused. "Incidentally," he called, "what were *you* doing at the Tron?"

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"What else would I be doing there on New Year?" replied Rebus. "I was working."

"No rest for the wicked, eh?" said Crawford, climbing the slope back up to the High Street.

Rebus watched until Crawford disappeared into the gloom. He knew he should follow him. After all, he *was* still working. He was sure now that Crawford had been speaking the truth, that he had nothing to do with the drug deal. Their meeting had been coincidence, nothing more. But who would have believed it? Trigger Crawford a "model prisoner." And they said mankind no longer lived in an age of miracles.

Rebus climbed slowly. There seemed more people than ever on the High Street. He guessed things would be at their busiest around half past midnight, with the streets emptying quickly after that. If the deal was going to go through, it would take place before that time. He recognised one of the Glasgow detectives heading towards him. As he spotted Rebus, the detective half-raised his arms.

"Where have you been? We thought you'd buggered off home."

"Nothing happening then?"

The detective sighed. "No, nothing at all. Lyons looks a bit impatient. I don't think he's going to give it much longer himself."

"I thought your informant was airtight?"

"As a rule. Maybe this will be the exception." The detective smiled, seemingly used to such disappointments in his life. Rebus had noticed earlier that the young man possessed badly chewed fingernails and even the skin around the nails was torn and raw-looking. A stressed young man. In a few years he would be overweight and then would become heart attack material. Rebus knew that he himself was heart attack material: h.a.m., they called it back at the station. You were lean (meaning fit) or you were ham. Rebus was decidedly the latter.

"So anyway, where were you?"

"I bumped into an old friend. Well, to be precise, an old adversary. Jackie Crawford."

"Jackie Crawford? You mean Trigger Crawford?" The young detective was rifling through his memory files. "Oh yes, I heard he was out."

"Did you? Nobody bothered to tell me."

"Yes, something about his son dying. Drug overdose. All the fire went out of Crawford after that. Turned into a Bible basher."

They were walking back towards the crowd. Back towards where

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Alan Lyons waited for a suitcase full of heroin. Rebus stopped dead in his tracks.

"Drugs? Did you say his son died from drugs?"

The detective nodded. "The big H. It wasn't too far from my patch. Somewhere in Patrick."

"Did Crawford's son live in Glasgow then?"

"No, he was just visiting. He stayed here in Edinburgh." The detective was not as slow as some. He knew what Rebus was thinking. "Christ, you don't mean . . . ?"

And then they were both running, pushing their way through the crowd, and the detective from Glasgow was shouting into his radio, but there was noise all around him, yelling and cheering and singing, smothering his words. Their progress was becoming slower. It was like moving through water chest-high. Rebus's legs felt useless and sore and there was a line of sweat trickling down his spine. Crawford's son had died from heroin, heroin purchased most probably in Edinburgh, and the man behind most of the heroin deals in Edinburgh was waiting somewhere up ahead. Coincidence? He had never really believed in coincidences, not really. They were convenient excuses for shrugging off the unthinkable.

What had Crawford said? Something about coming here tonight to make peace. Well, there were ways and ways of making peace, weren't there? "If any mischief should follow, then thou shalt give life for life." That was from Exodus. A dangerous book, the Bible. It could be made to say anything, its meaning in the mind of the beholder.

What was going through Jackie Crawford's mind? Rebus dreaded to think. There was a commotion up ahead, the crowd forming itself into a tight semicircle around a shopfront. Rebus squeezed his way to the front.

"Police," he shouted. "Let me through, please."

Grudgingly, the mass of bodies parted just enough for him to make progress. Finally he found himself at the front, staring at the slumped body of Alan Lyons. A long smear ran down the shop window to where he lay and his chest was stained dark red. One of the Glasgow officers was trying unsuccessfully to stem the flow of blood, using his own rolled-up coat, now sopping wet. Other officers were keeping back the crowd. Rebus caught snatches of what they were saying.

"Looked like he was going to shake hands."

"Looked like he was hugging him."

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"Then the knife . . ."

"Pulled out a knife."

"Stabbed him twice before we could do anything."

"Couldn't do anything."

A siren had started nearby, inching closer. There were always ambulances on standby near the Tron on Hogmanay. Beside Lyons, still gripped in his left hand, was the bag containing the money for the deal.

"Will he be all right?" Rebus said to nobody in particular, which was just as well since nobody answered. He was remembering back a month to another dealer, another knife. . . . Then he saw Crawford. He was being restrained on the edge of the crowd by two more plainclothes men. One held his arms behind him while the other frisked him for weapons. On the pavement between where Crawford stood and Alan Lyons lay dying or dead there was a fairly ordinary-looking knife, small enough to conceal in a sock or a waistband, but enough for the job required. More than an inch of blade was excess. The other detective was beside Rebus.

"Aw, Christ," he said. But Rebus was staring at Crawford and Crawford was staring back, and in that moment they understood one another well enough. "I don't suppose," the detective was saying, "we'll be seeing the party with the merchandise. Always supposing he was going to turn up in any event."

"I'm not so sure about that," answered Rebus, turning his gaze from Crawford. "Ask yourself this: how did Crawford know Lyons would be in the High Street tonight?" The detective did not answer. Behind them, the crowd was pressing closer for a look at the body and then making noises of revulsion before opening another can of lager or half-bottle of vodka. The ambulance was still a good fifty yards away. Rebus nodded towards Crawford.

"He knows where the stuff is, but he's probably dumped it somewhere. Somewhere nobody can ever touch it. It was just bait, that's all. Just bait."

And as bait it had worked. Hook, line, and bloody sinker. Lyons had swallowed it, while Rebus, equally fooled, had swallowed something else. He felt it sticking in his throat like something cancerous, something no amount of coughing would dislodge. He glanced towards the prone body again and smiled involuntarily. A headline had come to mind, one that would never be used.

LYONS FED TO THE CHRISTIAN.

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Someone was being noisily sick somewhere behind him. A bottle shattered against a wall. The loudest voices in the crowd were growing irritable and hard-edged. In fifteen minutes or so, they would cease to be revellers and would be transformed into troublemakers. A woman shrieked from one of the many darkened closes. The look on Jackie Crawford's face was one of calm and righteous triumph. He offered no resistance to the officers. He had known they were watching Lyons, had known he might kill Lyons but he would never get away. And still he had driven home the knife. What else was he to do with his freedom?

The night was young and so was the year. Rebus held out his hand towards the detective.

"Happy New Year," he said. "And many more of them."

The young man stared at him blankly. "Don't think you're blaming us for this," he said. "This was your fault. You let Crawford go. It's Edinburgh's balls-up, not ours."

Rebus shrugged and let his arm fall to his side. Then he started to walk along the pavement, moving further and further from the scene. The ambulance moved past him. Someone slapped him on the back and offered a hand. From a distance, the young detective was watching him retreat.

"Away to hell," said Rebus quietly, not sure for whom the message was intended.

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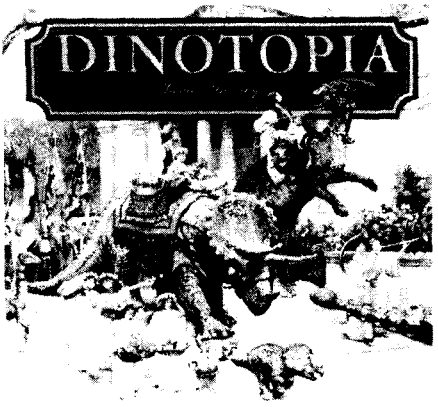
WORLDS OF WONDER THAT CHARM, ENTERTAIN & INSPIRE



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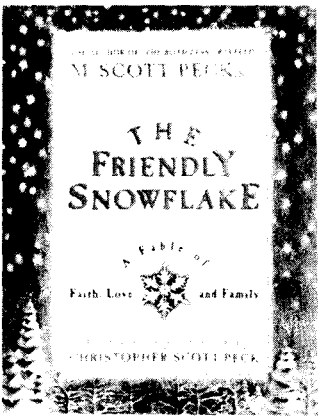

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a *NEW* short story by

JAMES POWELL

From the pen of EQMM's *most fanciful contributor, here is a clever piece of deduction set in ancient Arabia . . .*

THE TALE OF THE BLIND MAN'S LANTERN

by JAMES POWELL

Years ago, my masters, in better times than these, Haroun al Raschid, the Caliph of Bagdad, often walked out among his people in disguise, for as he once told Ja'afar, his wazir, his companion on such outings, "How else can I hear the laughter of the poor which, surely, rises up to proclaim their caliph's worth through the halls of Heaven itself?"

So it was that one evening after a tiresome day at statecraft, caliph, wazir, and the royal bodyguard Masrur stepped through the secret door in the palace garden and sought out the bazaar, where lanterns decorated the moonless night. Humankind crowded the stalls, for the weather had been unseasonably hot, and few stirred abroad until the sun had sunk below the city walls. The caliph and his companions saw rich, far-fetched silks and ivories and ingenious smithy work. They watched a swarthy man pipe a coil of rope skyward and send his boy clambering up it, who, reaching the very top, pulled the rope up after him and vanished in midair. In a coffeehouse, they overheard travelers tell of ruined cities beyond the margins of maps, in the realms of owls and dragons. They even lent a moment's ear to my own great-grandfather, Allah bless his soul, recounting a prettier tale than this, a story of old China, that blue and white land where marvelous Aladdin lived. But neither com-

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merce nor magical feats nor tales of travel or adventure could divert the caliph from the black mood brought on by the cares of state. Sighing at the venality of official man, he passed on without placing so much as a zuza in the storyteller's bowl. (So it is that when caliphs brood storytellers' children starve.)

Finally Haroun al Raschid led his companions away from the center of the city in search of streets as dark as his state of mind. In the beginning these narrow thoroughfares were busy with traffic and they stumbled into people hurrying to the bazaar and were jostled in turn by thoughtful, book-laden young scholars heading home from their studies in the lamp-lit mosque. But at last they reached a quiet residential quarter where fountains sang and the scent of a thousand flowers added cargo to the warm night air. Indeed, in those days a man did not say he had purchased a house, but rather said, "I now own a garden on such-and-such a street." But neither the laughing chatter of the women enjoying the rooftops nor the strum of lute strings and well-sung tales of love could cheer the caliph's spirits.

Suddenly they heard a sorrowful cry and, hurrying forward, found a man tearing his garments in despair in the street before a substantial house. When the caliph asked the cause of his unhappiness the man replied, "Sir, I am a servant here. My kind master is a fancier of rare old pieces of porcelain, prizing above all in his collection a goblet of eggshell thickness, all set about with diamonds and rubies, yet so delicately wrought it seems able to float on air and so fragile that only his hand may dust it. Now my master has a rival in the collecting of such objects, the wealthy olive merchant in High Street who, since he cannot buy the goblet, has begun to hint of other ways he might obtain it. As the saying goes, the rich man has a thousand hands to send against his neighbor's two.

"Last week, when his venerable father died in another city, my master took his family thither with filial tears to perform the ceremonial mourning, leaving me behind to guard his favorite goblet. Since his departure, I have slept with it in the strongroom each day and sat guard here each night, ever alert for thieves. Alas, the heat of these recent days kept me from my full measure of slumber so that tonight, against my every effort, I fell asleep. Awaking just now, I rushed into the house, unlocked the strongroom door, and discovered my master's precious goblet gone, though how I do not know." Here the poor man began to cry again.

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Moved by the man's misery, Haroun al Raschid set his own cares aside and said, "Often those from afar see things more clearly than the near-to-hand. Show my friend and me the room from which the goblet was stolen and allow our servant here to look about your garden."

"Who can refuse the help of thoughtful men's eyes, sir?" declared the servant, leading caliph and wazir toward the house. The strongroom had a substantial door and a heavy lock. The windows were barred with old-fashioned latticework. In addition, those facing onto the street were shuttered and bolted from within. "My friend," said Ja'afar, for so he could address his caliph when they were in disguise, "this open latticework recalls my childhood at my grandfather's, a house built in a more honest time. See how a thief might intrude his arm through the design well up to the shoulder."

"Yet to what purpose, friend?" replied the caliph. "The stolen goblet rested here, three arm's lengths from any window."

"Might not a thief entrap the vase in some clever device and draw it to him?" wondered the wazir.

"Yes, if he were at once ingenious and a fool to put so delicate an object to such a risk," replied the caliph.

"Tell your friend, then, how the goblet was stolen," requested the wazir.

Without replying, the caliph led the way back outside, where they found Masrur examining a high wall at the back of the garden. "Here, sir, the thief came and went," said the bodyguard, pointing to where the ivy was broken or pulled away from the wall and the marks in the soil where the thief had jumped to the ground."

"A child?" asked the caliph when he saw the size of the footprints.

The wazir fingered his beard and pursed his lips. "A child," he agreed.

As a man they looked over at the strongroom latticework, a relic of the days when thieves did not employ limber children in their work.

Turning back to the wall, the caliph mused, "Yet our child-thief's master waited and watched for several days until the caretaker fell asleep. Such patience breeds foresight. Would he then, do you think, send a delicate treasure up such a precarious road, in hands so young?"

Turning to the caretaker, the caliph now demanded, "Surely when you discovered the theft, you summoned the night watchman, who sounded the alarm."

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"I called, sir," came the reply. "To no avail."

The caliph frowned, for he had established a nightly patrol armed with drums to sound the alarm and cudgels to subdue the unlawful.

"But my shouts brought a cook from down the way," added the caretaker. "He told me the watchman, having caught some blind man pretending he could see, had gone to take him before the cadi."

The caliph cocked an eyebrow that so trivial a matter should interrupt the watchman's rounds. "Let my friend and me look further into this," he said.

Caliph, wazir, and bodyguard proceeded through the dark streets until they reached the local mosque, on whose porch the cadi held his court. There they found the watchman with his drum and cudgel, waiting to be heard. Thinking it best to listen to the case before deciding if the man had been delinquent in his duty, Haroun al Raschid sat down among the idle and the curious and signaled his companions to do the same. The matter presently before the court involved a poor man whose camel had been blinded in the left eye by a tile falling from a rich man's roof. As the caliph watched, the rich man leaned forward and whispered in the cadi's ear. Smiling, the cadi took a puff at his water pipe and passed judgment, ordering that the camel be slaughtered and the owner receive as damages an amount equal to the price the animal's left front quarter obtained when it was sold at the camel butcher's.

As a bailiff led the lamenting plaintiff away, the caliph signaled to his wazir to follow after them and countermand the sentence. Then he turned his attention back to the cadi who, licking his lips as a crocodile might as it smelled out another fresh morsel, asked, "Who else seeks justice here?"

Rising, the watchman asked ponderously, "Sir, does the law not say that he commits criminal fraud who claims to be what he is not, who wears the white turban of the sheik and is not a learned man, who puts out a doctor's sign but knows nothing of medicine?"

"That is so," declared the cadi.

"Then hear me, for tonight as I strode my watch I turned a corner and almost collided with this individual whom, by the light of his lantern, I recognized as one I have often seen beside the eastern gate crying out, 'Alms for a blind man!' But clearly he is not blind. And so I bring him before your honor to be charged with fraudulence, if you see fit."

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The accused was stooped with age and care. Until the watchman spoke, he had been sitting astare, wrapped in a heavy wool cloak, hands on knees and the lantern at his feet. Now he spoke, saying, "I am from Shiraz where Osman the Stern, when he conquered our city, blinded all who dared defend its walls. See the marks where the deed was done." Those in attendance knew well the story of Shiraz and Osman the Stern, and they recognized the scars where the red-hot sword blade had been laid across the blind man's eyes.

"Sir," continued the accused, "surely this law was meant to punish those who profit by claiming to be what they are not. How have I profited by carrying a lantern? I received nothing for doing it, not even guidance."

As the crowd murmured their agreement with these words, the watchman spoke again. "Why then, this blind man must be a thief, sir," he told the cadi. "Why else would a blind man so walk abroad, daylight or lantern light being nought to him, unless he steals old lanterns."

Smiling wryly at the laughter in the court, the blind man said, "Why condemn myself to greater beggary than is my present lot by stealing old lanterns?" He shrugged and asked the cadi, "Sir, is it a crime to walk abroad with a lantern?"

The cadi, seeing no profit for himself in this case, replied, "What is or what is not a crime is, indeed, for me to decide. And since our wise caliph's law most assuredly makes it criminal for a sighted beggar to pretend blindness, whether men give him alms or whether they give him nought, likewise it must be a crime for a blind beggar to pretend he is sighted, whether it profits him or not. So we sentence you to twenty lashes of the . . ."

But here Haroun al Raschid stood up angrily and threw off his disguise. "Foolish judge," he told the cowering cadi, "had you been as greedy for knowledge as you are for money, you might have learned not only why a blind man lights his way with a lantern, but why he wears a woolen cloak on a hot summer night." So speaking, the caliph bade Masrur remove the accused man's cloak. Beneath it, hanging in a leather bag around his neck, they discovered the goblet of great value and delicacy stolen earlier that evening.

Having recognized his caliph's voice, the blind man bowed his head and said, "Sire, I will tell all if no harm comes to my young accomplice." The caliph agreeing, the blind man continued, "Recently a man whose name I have sworn never to reveal offered me a considerable sum to steal this goblet."

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When the caliph uttered the name of the High Street olive merchant the court murmured again, marveling how their ruler had come to know such a thing. "That name was not heard from these lips, sir," insisted the blind man.

Then the accused continued his story. "For the last few nights, using my grandson's blessed eyes, I watched as the house caretaker sat guard, valiantly warding off every assault by honeyed sleep. How many times did his chin seek out his chest as lovers' lips strive for each other, only to be pulled back sharply and sternly rebuked. But tonight when chin and chest came together in a long embrace, I sent my grandson over the garden wall to slip into the strongroom through the lattice, unbolt the shutters of a street window, and pass the goblet out to me. Then he escaped the way he'd come and found our home by his own path. A clever child, sire. He deserves more of life than the hard apprenticeship I can give him. But to make a long story short, while bearing away the fruit of our endeavor, I mischanced to meet this dolt of a night watchman."

Said watchman, wishing to keep credit in the caliph's eyes, cried, "O wretch, you might easily have slipped by me, since darkness is a familiar street to you. Instead, you chose to light your way with a foolish lantern."

"O imbecile," replied the thief hotly, "can you not see that I carried a lantern for fear some clumsy oaf like you might blunder into me in the dark and break the goblet?"

These words so pleased the caliph that he laughed out loud. Then he set about arranging the matters of the evening. First, he ordered that the olive merchant receive a thief's punishment, so that henceforth he would have only nine hundred and ninety-nine hands to send against his neighbor's two. Next, he commanded that the cadi be stripped of the office he had debased and banished from the city with ten of the twenty lashes he had allotted to the blind man to speed him on his way.

"The remaining ten lashes you shall bear," Haroun al Raschid told the blind man. "And may you learn both justice and compassion from their sting. For afterwards we intend to make you cadi and have you sit in judgment of others. And as hostage to your probity, we shall take your grandson and charge ourselves with his education, reporting to him tales of how your wisdom serves like a lantern to light our people's way. Or elsewise, should you give us cause and wish to shame him so. Though surely his tears would rise up to proclaim his grandsire's ignominy through the halls of Heaven itself." ●

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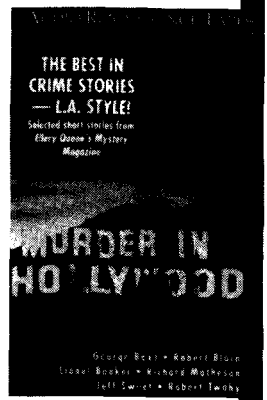

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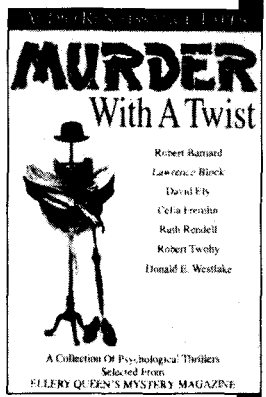

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a *NEW* Ben Snow story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

The seeds of the Ben Snow stories are often real historical incidents; in this case, the author came across the interesting fact that the most famous of all American Indian chiefs, Geronimo, paid a visit to Washington to march, along with other important tribal leaders, in the inaugural parade of President Teddy Roosevelt. Finding the possibilities of this irresistible, Mr. Hoch planted Ben Snow in the midst of the festivities and came up with the following story . . .

THE GERONIMO OPTION

by EDWARD D. HOCH

It was more than a year after Ben Snow's experience at Kitty Hawk, when he'd solved a mystery and witnessed the first flight of the Wright Brothers. He hadn't returned west after that, but remained in the East working as a guard and sometime investigator. He'd established his residence in Richmond, Virginia, and even voted in his first presidential election in 1904, casting his ballot for Theodore Roosevelt over the challenger, Alton Parker. At age forty-five, he was finally beginning to settle down.

Ben was reminded of the election on that chilly February day when a man named Howard Sharp called at the little office in downtown Richmond where Ben had set himself up in the protection business. Sharp was a tall man with short black hair and a bushy moustache. He might have been a transplanted westerner like Ben himself, and maybe that's why he seemed interesting.

"I work for President Roosevelt," he said as he shook hands across Ben's secondhand desk.

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"I voted for him."

"That's good. The government would like to hire you, Mr. Snow, to augment security arrangements on Inauguration Day."

Ben Snow glanced at his desk calendar. "That would be the fourth of March, a week from Saturday."

"Are you free to take on the job?"

"I thought the Secret Service handled such matters."

"We do, for the president himself. But there will be a number of other dignitaries attending the day's events. It's come to our attention that you played an important part in investigating the assassination of President McKinley four years ago. You're trustworthy and fast with a gun, if that becomes necessary."

"I don't know that I'd be very good protecting the life of some foreign ambassador who doesn't even speak the same language."

"There is a delegation of Indian chiefs arriving next week to ride in the procession on Inauguration Day. As a westerner yourself, you're the perfect man for the job."

"I've met very few chiefs in my time, but it sounds like a routine protection job. Who would I be guarding?"

"Mainly the Apache chief Geronimo. He is probably the most famous living Indian in the country today."

"Geronimo—" Ben repeated the name and his mind filled with a score of half-remembered tales from his younger days in the Southwest. Geronimo, the great warrior of the Chiricahua Apache. Geronimo, who led fearless charges on Americans and Mexicans alike. Who would have thought he would be ending his days riding in the inaugural procession of an American president?

"Will you do it?" Howard Sharp asked.

"Of course."

Washington was alive with activity as Inauguration Day approached. The Indian contingent gathered in the city on Friday, and Ben met each of them as their trains arrived. There were Hollow Horn Bear and American Horse of the Sioux, Quanah Parker of the Comanches, and Little Plume of the Blackfeet—all chiefs living on reservations around the country. But the fifth chief was the most important, and when Geronimo stepped off the train from Fort Sill, Oklahoma Territory, Ben was not surprised to note the entourage that accompanied him.

The old chief was in his seventy-sixth year, but he carried himself proudly erect. His face had aged well, with the lines bringing a

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mellow, almost friendly expression in contrast to the fierce photographs Ben had studied earlier. His hair was white, and he wore a dark kerchief around his neck, knotted at the front. Though he seemed to need no assistance, a young Indian woman—perhaps a half-breed—held one of his arms to give him support.

It was she who spoke. "My name is Tamia Ponter. Have you come to greet the great chief Geronimo?"

"The official greeter is inside the station. I have been assigned to watch over him and the other chiefs during their stay in Washington."

She spoke a few quick words of Apache to Geronimo and he nodded, extending his hand. "Your name?" Tamia Ponter asked.

"Ben Snow. I come from New Mexico, not far from where Geronimo once lived."

Her brown eyes flashed. "Until the government forced him to move and become a warrior!"

The old chief understood that, and he placed a restraining hand gently on her arm. "Ben Snow," he said, repeating the name, and held up a hand in greeting.

Tamia had recovered herself. "This is Red Duck," she announced, indicating the third member of their party. "And this is Lieutenant Breechman from Fort Sill, who has accompanied us. You understand that Geronimo is still technically a prisoner of war?"

"Of course." He nodded to the Indian and shook hands with the lieutenant. Red Duck had tiny eyes and a frown that seemed to engulf his entire face. Ben guessed him to be around forty, old enough to have fought in the Indian Wars as a young man. The army officer, in contrast, was a youth in his mid-twenties, perhaps not long out of West Point. Ben knew the type, and had seen many of them during his years out West. Breechman meant well, and would do his job, but to him Indians were a people apart, always to be viewed with distrust.

It was Tamia who seemed to be in charge, and she quickly herded the group into the station, where they were met by Commissioner Leupp from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. He explained to Tamia that they would be staying near the other four chiefs, in quarters provided by the Bureau.

Red Duck, standing beside Geronimo, said a single word, "Horses."

"All that has been taken care of," Leupp told them. "Geronimo and the other chiefs will ride in buggies tomorrow."

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"When will he meet with President Roosevelt?" Tamia asked.

"Next week," the commissioner informed them. "You must realize the president's schedule is very crowded, greeting all the foreign dignitaries arriving for the inauguration. But I understand Geronimo plans to remain in Washington until the end of next week?"

"That is correct."

"Then there is no problem. I will advise you of the president's schedule in the morning."

Geronimo was tired from the long train trip, and it was left to Red Duck to make arrangements for the parade. Ben soon found himself alone with Tamia Ponter, who assured him he would not be needed until morning. "Red Duck and the lieutenant are quite capable of defending us against attack."

"I think you're safe," Ben agreed. "Geronimo is a national figure, but any assassin would be far more likely to choose the president as his target."

"And make that man Fairbanks the president?"

Ben chuckled. "I share your opinion of the new vice president, but assassins rarely consider the effects of their actions." He was studying her closely for the first time, seeing a woman in her early thirties with full cheekbones and thin lips, brown hair and eyes. Overall, her features seemed more Caucasian than Indian. "You travel with Geronimo yet you are not Apache," he observed.

"My mother is a Ute and my father worked on the railroad. I've been teaching Indian children at Fort Sill, where Geronimo and his family farm the land. We became friends and I have traveled with him in recent years, acting as an interpreter. He understands some English and speaks a few words, but prefers his native tongue. He has received permission from the president to dictate his memoirs for publication. That will be done later this year."

"Will you translate his words?"

She shook her head. "He wants the son of an Apache warrior with whom he fought to do it. Geronimo is very loyal to old friends."

"It should be a fascinating book."

She nodded. "If he tells everything. Since his conversion to Christianity, Geronimo has taken on more of the white man's ways."

"How do you mean?"

She smiled at the memory. "You should have seen him at the St. Louis Exposition last summer. He was there for six months, appearing in their Wild West show, taking part in roping contests,

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selling his photographs and autographs. I think his biggest thrill was going for a ride on the Ferris wheel."

"I guess he's changed along with everything else out West."

"You mentioned coming from New Mexico. Did you live there long?"

"Until I was eighteen. After that I wandered all over the West—out to California a few times, and even up into Canada. I worked with a circus once, and on cattle ranches many times. I've even done some detective work. When the West started changing I drifted east and opened my protection service in Richmond. The government hired me for this job."

"Have you ever been married?"

"Never got around to it. Too much wandering, I suppose."

She tossed back her head, brushing the long brown hair from her face. "Will you be marching in tomorrow's procession?"

"I'll be as close to Geronimo as I can get."

Ben Snow met with Howard Sharp on Saturday morning, near the staging area for the inaugural parade. The Secret Service man was nervous and concerned. "Everyone's on edge since McKinley's killing. There are so many crackpots around these days! If anyone was going to take a shot at Teddy, this would be the day for it."

"Where does he take the oath of office?"

"East portico of the Capitol. It'll be administered by the Chief Justice."

"Do you want me to ride in the buggy with Geronimo?"

"No, just stay close and keep your eyes open. There are too many rumors flying around this city. I don't like it."

As they waited for the parade to begin, Lieutenant Breechman came up to speak with Ben. Though the day was not warm, he took off his officer's cap to wipe the sweat from his forehead. "I never did like parades. Do you think I'm in the wrong profession?"

"We all are, Lieutenant. How are things in Oklahoma? I haven't been west in four years."

"Quiet. We're gearing up for statehood. They say it's only a year or two away."

"It's getting to be a big country."

The band at the head of the parade line suddenly burst into a rendition of a Sousa march, the signal that they were moving out. Everyone fell into position quickly. Geronimo and the other chiefs were fairly far back in the line of march, perhaps befitting their

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conquered status. Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders were ahead of them, with a group of cowboys and various contingents of the armed forces. Judging by the line of march, Ben guessed the procession would go on for hours.

Finally, when the signal came and the buggy carrying Geronimo pulled out, Ben managed to walk beside it quite easily, staying near the spectators so as to attract as little attention as possible. He caught a glimpse of Red Duck on the opposite side of the street, but Lieutenant Breechman was not to be seen. Apparently he felt that his prisoner was secure enough in such a setting.

At noon, Ben watched from a distance as Theodore Roosevelt stood on the east portico of the Capitol and placed his left hand on the Bible. He raised his right hand and repeated the oath of office as Chief Justice Melville Fuller read it. "I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States. So help me God."

A great cheer went up from the thousands of spectators. Theodore Roosevelt had been sworn in for a second term, his first elected term of office. He was still alive, and so was Geronimo.

Ben Snow decided it was the easiest money he had ever earned.

Later that evening, after Geronimo and the other chiefs had put in brief appearances at the inaugural festivities, Ben met with his employer again. "We don't know what it means," Howard Sharp told him, "but there was a murder in the city tonight. A Sioux Indian traveling with American Horse was stabbed to death outside a bar. It's quite possible he was drunk and got in a fight, but we can't be sure. Maybe someone wanted it to look like that."

"But the inauguration is over. If there was any sort of plot we'd have more than a dead Indian in an alley."

"I don't know," the Secret Service man grumbled. "There's still nearly a week to go before things settle down. The chiefs aren't invited to the White House until next Thursday."

"Thursday!"

"I want you to stick with Geronimo at least until then. You'll be paid the same rate we agreed upon for the weekend."

"All right," Ben agreed. "But there's been no sign of any sort of attack on him."

"I want it to stay that way."

"Lieutenant Breechman—"

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"Breechman's a kid! If anyone tried to kill Geronimo he'd be helpless."

"I suppose you're right."

"We're relying on you, Snow."

Ben had worn his old Colt revolver in its holster beneath his jacket during the parade, and he continued to wear it on Sunday. A little derringer would have been easier to conceal, but he knew the six-shooter was far more accurate. He was a fast, perfect shot with it—something that had gotten him into trouble more than once in his youth.

Tamia Ponter and Red Duck were not happy to learn that the meeting with President Roosevelt would not take place until Thursday. "We must wait all week for it," the Indian grumbled.

"Geronimo is going to be here all week anyway," Ben pointed out.

Tamia agreed, but said, "It's just the idea of the Indians coming last, at the very end of things."

There was nothing to be done about it, though, and the chief set off with Lieutenant Breechman and Tamia on Sunday for a day of sightseeing around Washington. Ben and Red Duck decided they would act as his escorts the following day. He knew Sharp wouldn't approve of entrusting Geronimo's care to the lieutenant, but it gave Ben his first opportunity to talk with Red Duck alone.

"Did you ever fight with Geronimo," he asked, "in your younger days?"

"I rode with him in Mexico in eighty-six," the Indian said. "It was his last great campaign before his capture. We were sent to Florida, and then Alabama, but the climate there did not agree with him and his family. Finally the government allowed him to settle at Fort Sill."

"How many were you in Mexico?"

"Twenty warriors, plus women and children. We escaped from General Crook."

"Hardly enough for a great campaign," Ben pointed out.

Red Duck's frown seemed to deepen. "A better day is coming, the day of Thor, when thunder comes from the heavens."

"Geronimo is too old to fight again. The Indians have nothing but their memories."

Red Duck grunted and said nothing more. After a time he went out. Ben assumed he was a prisoner of war like Geronimo, but he'd been given no instructions to guard him. He needn't have worried,

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because the Apache was back within ten minutes. He'd merely gone to a nearby store for some tobacco.

It rained on Monday, and Geronimo stayed in his lodgings, carving a bow from a long piece of wood he'd brought with him. "He does that back at Fort Sill," Tamia explained to Ben. "Then he rides into Lawton to sell them."

"He's allowed to keep the money he earns?"

"A portion of it. When he sold photographs of himself at the St. Louis Fair, he charged twenty-five cents and kept a dime for himself. Sometimes he drinks, of course, and gambles. He attends the Dutch Reformed church and they do not approve."

"You know his vices."

"I know his vices and love the man." Her face seemed to glow as she said the words, and for the first time Ben was aware of the beauty in that face.

He watched the skill of the old chief's carving for some time, then went for a walk with Tamia while the lieutenant took over guard duty. They strolled along the Potomac as a light drizzle continued to fall. "You're a strange man, Ben Snow."

"In what way?"

"You're a man of the West, if ever I knew one. I picture you at home in the saddle yet you seem at home here, too."

"After half a lifetime of wandering, anyplace is home."

"Will you ever settle down, with a woman?"

"I suppose I could, if she'd put up with me." Tamia was silent for some time, and after a few moments Ben thought he should change the subject. "You say Geronimo sometimes rides into Lawton to sell his hand-carved bows. Apparently he's not under guard at all times?"

"Oh no. He's free to come and go on his own, within limits. It's only on these long trips that he has what he calls a keeper."

"It's a different way of life for him, too, as it is for me. The West changed for everyone."

"It's a new century, Ben," she said, lightly touching the sleeve of his jacket.

On Tuesday Howard Sharp awakened him before eight, knocking on the door of his room. "What is it?" Ben asked. "Geronimo—"

"No, no. He's all right." The Secret Service man looked uncomfortable in his tight collar, as if he'd been wearing it all night. "The

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police are questioning a suspect in the killing of that Indian. They don't think they can hold him much longer, but I thought you should see him before he's released—just to make sure he doesn't get too close to Geronimo."

"All right," Ben agreed.

They took a carriage to the Washington police headquarters, a drab building within sight of the Capitol dome. Ben followed Sharp inside and met a pair of detectives who ushered them into a block of holding cells at the rear of the building. The man in one cell was bruised and bloody. "What happened to him?" Sharp asked.

The detectives exchanged glances. "Resisting arrest. On your feet, Caznick."

The man appeared to be in his twenties, and one of the detectives identified him as an unemployed laborer named Paul Caznick. He stood up, the hint of a sneer on his face, and waited for the detectives to open the cell door. "Going to let me out finally?"

"Are you ready to talk, ready to tell us about stabbing that Indian?"

"I didn't touch him. I only saw him in the bar."

"And made threatening remarks."

"I told him we didn't want his kind around. Told him to get back on the reservation. He left and I didn't see him again."

It was Sharp's turn to speak. "If they release you from here, you're going to be under close surveillance. You so much as go near one of the Indians and you'll be back inside."

"You got nothing on me," Caznick boasted. "It's a free country. I can say what I want."

Ben had kept silent through all of this, but as they opened the cell door to release him, Ben's dark stare must have unnerved the prisoner. "What you lookin' at, cowboy?" he asked, catching sight of the holstered gun beneath Ben's coat.

"You. I want to make sure I remember you, next time we meet."

Caznick started to say something, then thought better of it. He wanted to be out of there, and he wasn't about to spoil his chances. When he was gone, Howard Sharp told Ben, "You've seen him. Don't let him anywhere near Geronimo."

"What about the other chiefs?"

"They've been warned, too. But Caznick made some remark about getting Geronimo. We think he might try it."

"If he really is the killer."

"You don't think so?" Sharp asked, stroking his bushy moustache.

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"He's not the sort to be part of any plot. He could be just somebody who had a few drinks too many in a bar and shot his mouth off. Maybe it was only a coincidence that American Horse's friend was killed that night."

"I don't believe in coincidences like that," Sharp said. "I tried to get the Washington police to hold him longer, but they couldn't do it without charging him, and the evidence just wasn't there."

"I'll stick close to Geronimo," Ben promised.

He did just that for the rest of Tuesday, accompanying him on a boat trip up the Potomac to see George Washington's home at Mount Vernon. Red Duck was along, too, translating for the old man. He said little to Ben, other than to comment once, "American Horse loses one of his braves."

"I know. The police are investigating."

"Are we in danger?"

"That's why I'm here, to make sure you're not."

In the barrackslike building in which they were lodged, Geronimo and Red Duck shared a bedroom. Tamia and Lieutenant Breechman and Ben each had separate, smaller rooms—mere cubicles with thin walls between them. Geronimo insisted on sleeping with the window open a crack, and since the building had only one story this bothered Ben. He imagined Caznick or someone else raising that window in the dead of night and firing a shot at the sleeping chief.

Reviewing the sleeping arrangements that evening, Ben had a suggestion. "Chief, I want you to change beds with Red Duck and let him sleep by the open window. It's either that or the window has to be closed."

Red Duck quickly translated the words. Geronimo thought about it and finally nodded his assent. Ben returned to his own room and was just settling down when Lieutenant Breechman came to the door. "Did you have a good day on the river?"

"It was a nice trip. I enjoyed seeing Mount Vernon, and I think Geronimo did too. Sometimes it's difficult to know what he's thinking."

"I'd like to be stationed back East here," the young officer confided. "I was born in Maryland and I miss the ocean."

"West Pointer?"

"Sure. Ten years ago when I made the decision I was still thinking about fighting Indians. At Fort Sill all you fight is boredom."

"Times have changed," Ben said with a sigh. "No one knows it better than I do."

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Breechman dropped into a chair, settling in as if he meant to stay awhile. "My first name's Bill. I don't think I mentioned it before."

"I'm Ben, but you know that."

"God, I wish I had a life like you've had!"

"You've been listening to too many stories."

"Is it true that people mistook you for Billy the Kid because of your fast draw?"

"More likely because of my callowness. I thought I knew everything."

"Did you ever meet Billy?"

"Never did."

"Some say he's still alive."

"Probably is. Probably runs a cigar store in Taos or someplace."

Breechman chuckled. "With a wooden Indian out in front." He leaned back in the chair, cradling his head in his hands. "What do you think of that gal Tamia? Pretty good, huh?"

"She's too old for you, Bill."

"I see her around the fort all the time. She teaches the Indian kids."

"So she said. She got a boyfriend out there?"

"Not really. The whites avoid her because she's part Indian, and the Indians avoid her because her father was white. The kids love her, though. And Geronimo."

Ben stifled a yawn. "Guess I'll turn in early tonight. What's the schedule for tomorrow?"

"Tamia and I can escort Geronimo, unless you feel you should come along."

"Let's see how things look in the morning."

Ben turned out his light and was asleep within minutes. He heard nothing through the night, but when he awakened just before dawn there was a sense of unease. Something had intruded on his dreams, some sound that was unfamiliar. Then, fully awake, he heard it again through the thin wall of the room. It was a deep-throated Indian chant, one he'd heard before—a sort of dirge for the dead. He got out of bed and went to the next room, softly opening the door.

Geronimo was kneeling by Red Duck's bed, chanting and holding his arms wide above his head. Ben saw the bloodied sheet and ran to get the others. He pounded on the other two doors and shouted, "Breechman, Tamia! Come quick! Red Duck's been murdered!"

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It was Tamia who did her best to question Geronimo, both before and after the arrival of the Washington police. Apparently there was little to be learned. The old chief had heard nothing while he slept. When the first light of dawn awakened him, he looked over and saw Red Duck covered with a bloodied sheet. He'd been stabbed once, through the heart. There was no sign of a weapon.

"The window seems to be opened higher than I left it," Ben observed, "but Red Duck may have wanted more fresh air. I wonder—"

He was interrupted by the arrival of Howard Sharp, looking disheveled and dangerous. "My God, Snow, how could you let this happen?"

Ben took a deep breath. "I was hired to protect Geronimo, and as you can see he's unharmed."

"No thanks to you!"

It was Tamia Ponter who came to Ben's defense. She hadn't had time to dress, and still wore an Indian robe over her nightdress. "Ben suggested they exchange beds last night. If it wasn't for him you'd be staring at Geronimo's corpse right now."

"That's only if the killer came through the window," Ben pointed out. "If it was one of us, we knew who was in which bed."

"One of us? What motive would we have for killing Red Duck?"

"None that I know of," Ben admitted.

"I'll have the police pick up Paul Caznick again," Sharp decided. "He looks like our best suspect."

Ben noticed a policeman searching around outside the window, his eyes on the ground. "Have they found the weapon?"

Sharp shook his head. "They've searched this whole place. There's no knife inside the building and nothing outside."

"What about footprints under the window?"

"The ground's still a bit damp from Monday's rain, but not enough to give us anything certain. Someone might have stood there and boosted himself up through the window, but there's no evidence of it."

Ben bit on his lip, trying to think. "Did they find any other bloodstains?"

"No. He was stabbed through the sheet, so that caught most of the blood."

"How will this affect plans for tomorrow's reception at the White House?"

Howard Sharp looked unhappy. "We don't know yet."

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Geronimo's sightseeing was canceled for the day, though Sharp tried to make up for it by arranging a powwow with the other chiefs. Tamia, Lieutenant Breechman, and Ben all accompanied him, but later Tamia told Ben, "I've never seen him like this. The murder of Red Duck has been a terrible blow to him. I think it's like losing a son."

"They were that close?"

"Indeed. Geronimo is not a man to show deep emotion, but this thing has really hit him hard."

"He spoke with the other chiefs?"

She nodded. "Especially with American Horse, who also had one of his braves murdered here this week. Some think it's more than a coincidence."

"A plot against the Indians?"

"Who knows? There are many people with long memories and bitter hearts. Perhaps someone whose father was tortured and killed by Indians—"

That night Sharp informed him that the Washington police still had not located Paul Caznick.

Thursday morning was bright and sunny, a hint that the Washington winter might be coming to an end. Arrangements had been made to return Red Duck to Oklahoma for burial, and the newspaper accounts of the killing made only the briefest mention of the earlier murder. More important, at the moment, were the postinaugural activities at the White House. Tamia was incensed to learn that some of the cowboys who rode in the inaugural procession had stayed overnight at the White House at the invitation of President Roosevelt.

"Did you read this?" she asked, shoving the newspaper at Ben. "Why do these cowboys sleep in the White House when five great chiefs must sleep in barracks?"

Ben sighed. She had a point, but so did the president. "It's cowboys and Indians, Tamia, and the cowboys always win. The Indians lost the war, just as the South lost the Civil War. You can't expect them to be treated like heroes."

"I only expect them to be treated like human beings," she answered sullenly.

"They'll be at the White House today and the president will greet them."

"And lecture them. The Great White Father!"

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Unfortunately, the White House reception was pretty much as she had predicted. Commissioner Leupp was there to greet them, and the chiefs and their parties were escorted in to be presented to President Roosevelt. For all his boisterous good humor, Theodore Roosevelt remained the president. As each chief stepped forward he shook hands and said a few words of greeting. The solemn-faced chiefs stepped back in line and gazed silently as he gave them some wholesome advice on the future of the Indian nations. Then they departed without a word. The reception was at an end.

"What did you think?" Ben asked Tamia as they left the White House.

"Wasn't it just as I predicted?"

"What did Geronimo think?"

"I don't know. He's always admired Roosevelt. Perhaps he was uplifted."

Back at their rooms, Ben breathed an audible sigh of relief. "At least no one tried to kill the chiefs. My bodyguard job is almost over."

"Aren't you going to solve Red Duck's murder?" Tamia asked.

"I wasn't hired for that."

Breechman was the last one in, and he reported, "There's someone outside yelling. It could be a drunk."

Ben looked out the window. In the dimming afternoon light he recognized Caznick. "I'll take care of this."

"Be careful, Ben!" Tamia called out.

He stepped from the doorway and walked down the cinder path toward Paul Caznick. "Can I help you with anything?"

"Hey, it's the cowboy!" Caznick was wearing an open lumberjack's coat with a heavy sweater beneath it. Ben couldn't tell if he was armed. "Send out the Indian! I want to see Geronimo. He's staying here, isn't he?"

That would have been in the newspaper accounts of the murder, of course. "Go away, Caznick. There's nothing here for you."

"Send out the Indian!" the young man repeated. "This is Geronimo's last stand!"

Ben pushed his coat back so Caznick could see the gun. "You're only making things worse for yourself."

"I got one of them, too, cowboy." His right hand ducked inside his coat and came out holding a little derringer.

Ben shot it out of his hand without even aiming.

* * *

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Howard Sharp came with the police to pick up Caznick. "I guess you earned your pay," he told Ben.

"It wasn't too difficult."

"We'll take him in for questioning. Claims he was with his girlfriend all Tuesday night, but we'll see about that."

"It might be a good idea if Geronimo started home early," Ben suggested, "before anyone else gets ideas about taking a shot at him."

Sharp nodded. "I'm happy Geronimo is safe. We've been getting reports all day of rumblings on some of the reservations. Nothing serious, just a few young braves acting up. But if anything had happened to Geronimo it might have turned bloody."

Ben turned that over in his mind. He was considering the possibility that Howard Sharp had everything backwards, but he dare not mention it until he was sure. "I'd better get back to Geronimo," he said.

Inside he found Tamia sitting with the old chief. "He wants to go home," she said. "All this excitement is too much for him."

"That's best," Ben agreed. "He can get a train out of here first thing in the morning."

"Where are you going now?"

"I need to get a ladder."

He found one behind the barracks and propped it against the outside wall of the building. Then he climbed up to examine the roof above Geronimo's window. When he came down Tamia was waiting for him. "What did you find?" she asked quietly.

"What I was looking for. Proof that Red Duck was killed by Geronimo himself."

They walked for a long time outside, leaving the old chief with Lieutenant Breechman. "That's impossible!" she insisted at first. "Red Duck was his most loyal friend. They fought together, for God's sake!"

"I know. I also know that Geronimo killed him. The police searched the place and found no knife. No knife—do you understand what that means?"

"Tell me."

"There should have been a knife! We watched Geronimo carving his bow during the rain on Monday. What happened to that knife? Why was it no longer here? If it was taken and used by the killer, why didn't Geronimo say so? There could only be one possible rea-

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son—Geronimo himself had used it to murder his friend. Perhaps the idea came to him when I suggested they should change beds. With Red Duck next to the window, an attack from outside—aimed at Geronimo—would have been likely."

"And where is this vanished knife now?"

Ben took his hand from his pocket and showed it to her. "Here. I'm sure you recognize it. I asked myself what he could have done with it. He couldn't have left the room, and it was neither inside nor outside the building. The window had been opened farther, though, not so a killer could enter but so Geronimo could throw the knife away. He didn't throw it to the ground, where it would have been quickly found and identified as his. He threw it up, onto the roof, where it slid into the gutter. That's where I found it. You can still see the dried blood on it."

"Why?" she asked. "I believe it but I don't believe it. You have to tell me why."

"Sharp told me he has reports of restlessness among young braves today on some of the reservations. You see, he had everything backwards. He was protecting Geronimo against an attack when President Roosevelt was the real target. Red Duck planned to assassinate the president when they met him at the White House this afternoon. The assassination would have set off a revolt by Indians across the country."

"That's crazy! What could they hope to gain?"

"Everything that's been taken from them," Ben said quietly.

"I—"

"When I spoke with Red Duck on Sunday he said something odd. He said a better day was coming, the day of Thor, when thunder comes from the heavens. It seemed odd for an American Indian to be referring to Scandinavian mythology, but I didn't think too much about it until today. Red Duck had just heard that the meeting with the president would take place on Thursday—Thor's day—and he was referring to that. It was the day his thunder would strike down the president and start the Indian revolt."

Tamia nodded for the first time. "We teach the children the days of the week in school. He would have heard about Thor's day from one of them. But how did Geronimo know all this?"

"His old comrade Red Duck must have confided the plan to Geronimo, hoping to win his participation. But the old chief had changed over the years, changed more than even Red Duck realized. Geronimo had an option—to do nothing and see the president slain before

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his eyes, the country racked by a revolt of his people, or to stop Red Duck any way he could. When I suggested changing the beds he saw how Red Duck could be stopped. He killed his old friend and then prayed over the body."

They had stopped walking and she stood staring at the window of Geronimo's room. "And the other Indian who died?"

"American Horse's brave? He may have objected to the plan just as Geronimo did, and Red Duck killed him. I've no proof of that, but if Geronimo knew of such a crime it would have spurred him into taking decisive action."

"And what will you do now, Ben Snow?"

"Do? Nothing. Sharp is satisfied and knows nothing of all this. The unrest on the reservations will die down. And Geronimo? In a way he is a national hero, though that will never be known to anyone but us."

In the morning Ben saw them to the station, and shook Geronimo's hand one last time. Their eyes met, and the old chief said his name. "Ben Snow."

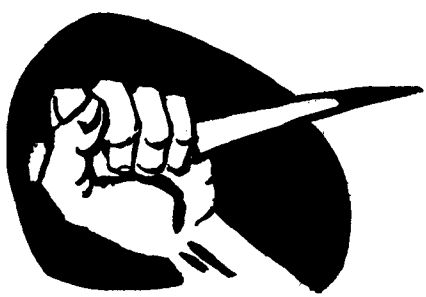
"Geronimo, the greatest of chiefs."

As Lieutenant Breechman helped Geronimo board the train, Tamia Ponter kissed Ben on the lips. "I've been wanting to do that," she said.

"Come back East," he told her. "I want to see you again."

"This summer," she promised.

The following year, Geronimo's memoirs were published. Though he devoted a chapter to the St. Louis World's Fair, he never mentioned his visit to Washington and what happened there. The book, however, was dedicated to Theodore Roosevelt, ". . . because I believe that he is fair-minded and will cause my people to receive justice in the future . . ."



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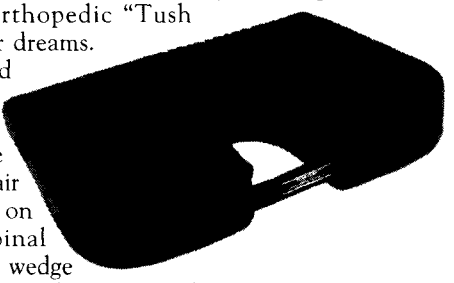

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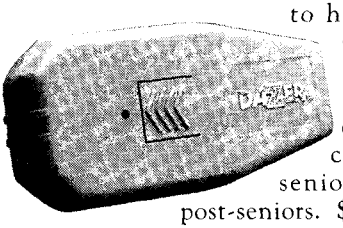

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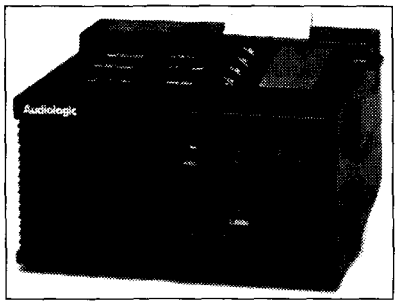

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a *NEW* short story by

BLANCHE BOSHINSKI

For those of you beginning to feel winter's chill, here is a tale of a sweltering summer day to warm the bones—and, we hope, the heart . . .

ONE HOT SATURDAY

by BLANCHE BOSHINSKI

Roxy wanted to sleep, but fear and one consuming thought kept her awake.

If I don't get away, Sancho will sell the baby.

Think, she commanded her brain as Sancho bounded and dipped around the one-room apartment with her two-hour-old son cradled in his arm. His young, hard muscles flexed in the confines of tight jeans and a blue tank top. The baby's cheek rested on the fierce-eyed eagle inked into Sancho's skin.

She shifted her tired hips and wished for more than a lumpy mattress on the floor as she lay in a swamp of sweat. The afternoon heat surged through the open window as it rose from the broiled city asphalt three floors below. It weighted down her mind and body like a steamy quilt.

"Sanchy, give me the baby." Roxy held out her arms.

Sancho stopped his antics, folded up his lean body, and sat on his heels beside Roxy as he handed her the small bundle of baby and blanket.

Sancho smelled of sweat and excitement, just as he did when he came home from bowling or playing ball, but now odors of baby powder and oil intermingled with the animal smells and sent conflicting messages to Roxy about the real Sancho Gonzales.

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"I knew I'd feel this way if we stayed here at home, just the three of us, like family," Sancho said. He reached out with his scarred index finger and pushed a strand of her long, damp hair back from her face. His voice was even softer than usual.

Roxy could only think of what a cool and safe place a hospital room would have been to deliver her son. And quiet, too. Along with the heat from the street came the din of cars, sirens, and Mike Mokowski's wife yelling at her three boys from their Polish Cafe across the street.

"When the baby was inside you, another man was father," Sancho said. "Now, when he popped into my hands, in my own place, I know he belongs to me."

Roxy wanted to cry out, "No! He's only mine," but she needed at least a half hour to get away. Sancho must not find out she knew this was playacting on his part, a way to keep the birth a secret from officials.

She wished she were big and strong, not a 101-pound shorty. Roxy wanted to hurt Sancho, beat him with her fists. But she had to beat him with a plan instead.

"Born on Monday, fair in face; Born on Tuesday, full of grace," Sancho said in a singsong voice. "How does the rest go, Roxy? You told me your grandma used to say it."

"Born on Wednesday, sour and sad." She wiped her face with the damp cloth Sancho had given her earlier. "You know I can't remember it all."

"Then I will make the rest up myself. Born on Thursday, never bad; Born on Saturday, makes me glad."

"You missed Friday," Roxy said as she tried to keep up a sane conversation.

"Who cares?" Sancho hunched up his shoulders and laughed as he always did at his own jokes. "This is a Saturday baby."

"I'm hungry, Sanchy." She was already planning what she needed to take when she escaped.

Sancho slapped his palm to his forehead as he stood up with a spring.

"Food. We forgot to eat, Roxy. You want pepperoni pizza, a Big Mac?"

He looked awful as he stood there above her. Red rimmed his brown eyes, and black stubble shadowed his long jaw. She had woken him with a cry before midnight when her labor began.

"No, something very special for a special day," she said.

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Roxy's mind scanned the far edges of the neighborhood among its small delis, pizza shops, and cafes, all wedged between barbers, pawn shops, hardware niches, and who-knew-what behind painted windowpanes.

"A mixed platter from the Sea House," she told him. "With shrimp, crab, and all those other fishy things."

"You like the scallops."

"Yes, that's it. I can't ever remember what to call them." Then she added, "But it's too hot for you to walk so far."

"Never too far for you, Roxy." He slipped on his canvas shoes by the door and checked his pocket for his thin wallet.

"You be okay?"

Roxy nodded.

"And a strawberry shake from Mike's before you come up."

That would use up more time. He would get to talking to Mike about his new job on Monday. Sancho had really scammed her on that deal.

"Another chance, Roxy," Sancho had told her when his friend Jake verified the job offer at the small machine shop where he worked. "I'll make enough so we can have a real apartment with a closet and a refrigerator that will make ice."

He had spun a beautiful dream.

"And maybe a room just for the baby," she had added.

"I'm good with my hands, Roxy, and I'm going somewhere. It's like I have a mountain to climb and when I get to the top, I can look around at the whole world."

But Sancho had to furnish his own hand tools. He quit buying candy bars and licorice. When Roxy's fingernail polish ran out, she didn't buy another bottle. They both worked extra hours. Every extra penny, and some that weren't extra, were counted and saved.

Sancho was good with his words, too.

Now, Sancho had his micrometers, T-squares, punches, rulers, safety glasses, and all the other things he needed. They were packed in his expensive tool box and locked in the storage room of Mike's cafe.

Monday he started the job. But Roxy knew now that Sancho couldn't climb the mountain he had in mind on the salary of a beginning machinist. It would have been plenty for her, but not for the other woman she knew about now. That's why he'd stolen Brenda's baby, but he wouldn't get hers.

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The moment the door shut behind Sancho, Roxy sat up. The room swung around her like a ball at the end of its tether. She grabbed the corner of the dresser, stood up, and let things swing until she could control her feet.

Roxy had neither time nor strength to take much. Pack a bag for the baby, go down through the basement, out the back, and catch a cab on Third Avenue. Ev would be home sleeping. It was her week to work nights. Ev would pay the taxi.

Evelyn Wyatt had warned Roxy a month or so before while she was well, happy, and in love with Sancho.

"What can you really know about him in three months?" she asked Roxy.

They had been folding sheets in the laundry at The Haven when Ev asked the question. This was a quiet time after lunch, away from the jabber and constant demands of the old and sick.

Roxy had trusted Ev to give her good advice, but that day she sprang to Sancho's defense. How could anyone not see that he was a wonderful person!

"He's kind to the old people. Have you seen him feeding Mrs. McKelvey?" Roxy asked. "We have fun. Sancho makes eating a bologna sandwich on a playground bench a holiday."

"But why should someone like Sancho want to play daddy to your baby?"

"Someone like Sancho," Roxy had echoed aloud, wanting an explanation, but thinking to herself, Because he loves me.

Ev hesitated, then laughed. She gave Roxy's arm a pat. "I'm just an old worrywart."

Roxy had noticed Sancho the first day he came to work at The Haven. He made swishing a mop and climbing a ladder to change a bulb an athletic event. He whistled and tucked lap robes around spindly legs and pushed chairs to sunny spots in the lounge. Faces that usually did nothing but stare, wrinkled with smiles when Sancho willed it.

So Roxy didn't consider Ev's question until this past Monday. That's when the terrible heat began. Roxy wilted. She couldn't manage lifting patients or making beds. She went home and crawled up the stairs a few at a time. Her week of imprisonment in the hot room began. Time was filled with thinking, then doubting.

Looking back, Roxy saw that real worry began at Brenda's party Wednesday evening.

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Brenda said it was a celebration of freedom. Marvin had finally cleaned out all his stuff and left for good. Roxy hadn't met Brenda's wayward husband and Sancho offered no opinions.

"That's their business, not mine," he said when she asked questions.

Sancho helped her up the one flight of stairs to Brenda's apartment. Once they had to stop in the midst of a giggle attack. He kissed the back of her neck. Everything was going to be all right after all.

He brought her a cold ginger ale then disappeared with a group of men into the perspiring crowd packed in the small living room and dinette. Roxy stood at the edge near a window, trying to catch a breeze from a small fan. Snatches of conversation came from every direction.

"Where's Helena?" a woman's low voice asked.

"She and Sancho split," came the reply.

"I can't believe that."

The words became lost when Mike and his wife pushed by Roxy as they called to a group of newcomers.

". . . said when he got to the top of that mountain he's always yakking about to give her a call," the voice was saying. "I think she gave him six months to get out of this dump."

"So, time's almost up. Interesting and . . ."

Roxy sat her unopened soda can on the window ledge and began a laborious journey to the door.

"Hi, Roxy. Still hanging in there, eh?"

"You okay? Should I find Sancho?"

Roxy nodded, shook her head, and tried to smile as she squeezed through groups of friends and neighbors.

Who among them had known about Sancho's plan that night?

Who had smiled, yet knew what was to happen to her?

The banister acted as a lifeline as she groped her way down the stairs.

In a couple of minutes, Sancho was there. She had sent him back up to the party and let exhaustion drug her to sleep.

When she woke before dawn, Sancho was not there.

During the night he had stolen Carmen.

The three-month-old infant had been sleeping in her basket just outside Brenda's bedroom door after everyone left the party.

"Whoever went in knew the building and knew Brenda McCoy's apartment," the young policeman said when Sancho asked what he thought happened.

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No ransom note came, of course. Everyone knew Brenda didn't have money, just the old Chevy she drove to take Carmen to her mother's before she caught the bus for work.

"The baby's been sold," Mrs. Haskins said.

The coarse middle-aged woman stood leaning in the doorway of her apartment across the hall from Roxy after talking to the police. Her nose was red and scaly from the cold that had kept her home from work.

"Babies bring whopping prices these days," she told Roxy.

Roxy kept checking her watch and guessing at Sancho's progress down the streets to the Sea House as she packed diapers, blankets, powder, and the expensive baby clothes Sancho had bought.

His spending finally made Roxy see the truth.

Sancho had come home from work the day after the kidnapping with two plastic bags full of purchases. Roxy had stopped peeling potatoes and watched, dumbstruck, as he pulled out flannel nightclothes, bibs, hand-knit booties, all in yellow for a boy or a girl, he declared. There were three red plastic ducks, a crocheted blanket, and a two-foot-high teddy bear.

He gave an extravagant bow as he pulled out a dozen roses, eleven yellow and one red, and presented them to Roxy.

"Stop it," she ordered. "Stop playing. Where did you get the money?"

"When you want something very much, you find a way," Sancho said.

He danced her around the room and took bites out of the potato she still had in her hand. "I decided I had to have money. Presto! I have money. No questions or I'll leave you and go talk to Mike."

Later, when Roxy pieced things together, she was scared to ask anything more. And Sancho changed. She would see him watching her; then, if she caught his eye, he'd start being silly and walk around the room on his hands or lip-sync with a song on the stereo. Other times, he left, making an excuse about having to see someone.

She should have left him then, but there was still a hope she was wrong. Besides, it was so hot!

Roxy looked around the room to see what more she needed to pack before dressing. Her legs started to tremble from fatigue, and she eased herself down onto the bed. A few minutes rest would be safe. Sancho couldn't be back for several minutes, even if he ran.

* * *

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Roxy woke to Sancho's whistling and slurpy noises of the baby sucking his knuckles. She opened her eyes to see him setting a carry-out container from the Sea House on the counter along with a red bowl with a plate balanced on top. The shake cup was in the crook of his arm.

"Mrs. Romero sent sliced ham, cut thin like paper," Sancho said over his shoulder. "The bowl is full of Frieda's good vegetable soup, and Mike will bring up breakfast tomorrow. I ordered blueberry waffles, the ones you like."

He set the shake and dinner on the card table beside Roxy, then went for cushions from the sagging sofa to put behind her back.

As Roxy ate, Sancho sat beside her and ruffled the baby's sandy-colored hair.

"The scallops are good," she said. "Thanks, Sanchy. You have some, too."

"No, Mike gave me a sandwich," he said, and added, "That Mike's my real friend. Tomorrow we borrow his car and go to the clinic. We get proof that my Lech is the healthiest baby ever born."

"The baby's name is David," Roxy said. "What kind of name is Lech?"

"You know, Lech, the Polish guy that changed the world," Sancho replied. He was quoting Mike Mokowski again. "My baby will be that kind of man someday."

Roxy didn't answer. What difference did it make to either of them, since Sancho was playing a game and she would be gone and could call the baby whatever she wished.

Sancho wanted the fancy clothes and the health check to show David off to the best advantage. Wasn't that what you did when you had something for sale?

The baby coughed.

In an instant Sancho scooped him up and held him with his tiny head on his shoulder.

"When Maria came, I was twelve," he said. "Lech fits against me like my baby sister."

"Where is she now?"

This is what Ev meant. Roxy knew nothing about Sancho's family or his past, and he didn't ask her questions, either. She had been foolish enough to be satisfied with each day and the future.

"Two years since I've seen Mama or my brother or sister. Things don't go so well between us." Almost wistfully, Sancho added, "Maybe someday."

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Sancho walked around the room with the baby, pointing. "This is a chair. That is Mama." He grinned at Roxy. "This is a dresser. Inside are nice things for Lech."

"Did you see Brenda?" Roxy asked.

"No," Sancho said quickly. "How could I tell Brenda you have a beautiful baby when her little Carmen is gone?"

Roxy bit into a shrimp. It would hardly go down as her throat squeezed tight on the question she wanted to ask. Why couldn't she just say, "Who did you call on Mrs. Romero's phone yesterday, Sancho?" But the shrimp stuck. The question wouldn't come out.

When Sancho had left for work yesterday, she had gone after him into the hall to tell him to bring home cold soda. She reached the stairway and heard Sancho's voice.

Anyone on the floor was welcome to use Mrs. Romero's phone, but you had to leave the door to the hallway open.

"Nobody's going to beat up this old woman without a witness," she always joked when someone tried to shut it.

Sancho's voice had carried his anger to Roxy. She couldn't understand much Spanish, but enough to catch some words. House. Baby. Brenda. The argument was about money, but she couldn't understand the figures. The other person was Danny. When Roxy heard her own name, she stumbled back to the room.

The street noises diminished a little at dusk, but not the heat. Back home in the mountains a bit of coolness always came with darkness. The roses Sancho had brought her were still in the mayonnaise jar, hanging limp and brown.

She thought of the rose trellis behind her home where she grew up. The tomatoes on the vines by the back fence would be ripe now. Like Sancho, Roxy thought, Maybe, someday.

Sancho had turned on a Spanish music station and was dancing with David. Roxy put the uneaten food on the table. The milkshake had turned soupy warm in the plastic cup before she had drunk more than a few swallows.

Sancho leaned out the open window.

"Hey, Mr. Rosen, look what I've got," he yelled as he held up David.

Suddenly, Sancho spun from the window and dashed across the room to the door. "It's Danny," he said as he disappeared into the hall, leaving the door open behind him.

"Sancho, leave David," Roxy cried out.

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She started to get up, to run after him. But she lay back down. What did it matter? The baby would have a home with someone who could pay for all the nice things in life. How could she manage alone? Why had she even thought she could run to Ev?

Roxy rolled off the mattress and onto her knees before getting up. As she dressed in the pink flowered dress Sancho had bought her soon after they met, she was barely aware of the voices in the building calling to one another. Doors slammed. Someone pounded down the stairs.

She was sitting in the straight chair by the table when Sancho came in without David. She had stayed to tell him to his face what she thought of him.

The room had turned dark except for the blinking yellow light outside their window that advertised the laundromat below and a faint glow from the hallway light through the open door. Sancho glanced around the dim room looking for her. The sign blinked on and off, first shining on his face, bathing it in gold, then putting him back into shadows.

He came and sat on the floor in front of her.

"I've done a bad thing, Roxy. I should have told you before, but I was so scared you'd leave me."

"It doesn't matter now," she said listlessly. Roxy wiped her dripping forehead with her hand.

"But it does matter. You worked so hard to help me."

Outside in the halls the commotion continued. Gradually Roxy put the shouting and calls together.

"Brenda has her baby?" she asked with disbelief. "You gave Brenda her baby?"

"Not me," Sancho said. "My cousin Danny. I figured Brenda's husband had Carmen. We just had to find him. Danny can find anybody, but he wants money. Always the money, nothing because it's the right thing to do."

A voice interrupted from the doorway. "Are you here? I brought up David."

Mrs. Mokowski was silhouetted against the hall light. "He was getting fussy, probably hungry. Is everything all right now, Sancho?"

"I haven't told her yet," he said.

"He's a handsome baby," the woman said. As her eyes adjusted to the dark, she handed the baby to Roxy. "I like the name David. As Sancho says, it's the name of a winner."

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All of the past week's events made a jumble of jigsaw pieces, and the picture Roxy had been putting together didn't make any sense at all.

"Listen to me, Roxy," Sancho insisted when the woman had left. "This is it. I had to sell my tools. I paid Danny, I bought David his things and the roses for you."

"You sold your tools?" Slowly, one by one, the jigsaw pieces fell into place.

"I'm sorry. We have to start all over."

"But I want to start over," she said. "Oh, Sanchy, I've had such crazy ideas. It's because of the heat."

"Sure, I know," Sancho said as he lay back on the floor with his hands under his head and gave a long sigh. "Everyone in the city gets that way. But it isn't the heat, Roxy. It's the humidity."

DETECTIVERSE

TOO MANY WHACKS

by LILLIAN DE LA TORRE

Miss Borden, a.k.a. Lizzie,
One morning got into a tizzy,
    She grabbed up an axe
    And gave 81 whacks
To her parents, which sure kept her busy.

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The mystery writer turned amateur sleuth is a familiar figure in mystery fiction. Less often seen is the mystery writer turned crook or murderer. Mr. Cenedella may have figured out why. . .

ONCE A WRITER . . .

by ROBERT CENEDELLA

When Eric Bessemer decided to murder his wife, he felt quite smug about his chance of doing it with impunity.

Eric, after all, was the greatest murder-thinker-upper in the country. Not only did he bring out once every six months a mystery novel featuring Peter Ilyitch, Private Eye (whose fans disputed about whether he was called P. I. because those were his initials or because that was his profession)—but Eric also wrote monthly magazine stories about murders committed by people in ordinary pursuits of life (*The You or Me Murders 1,* or *2,* or *3,* or *16,* or *370,* these were numerically entitled); and finally, most popular and most numerous of all his endeavors, there was his weekly television series, *Murder in the First Degree,* the only such show still filmed in New York, and the only one ever whose remarkably ingenious killings were all devised by the same writer—Eric Bessemer—and all solved by Bessemer's remarkably perspicacious detective, Bernie Zuckerman, who each week in a final speech delivered straight into the camera's eye, revealed to Mr. & Mrs. America and all the ships at sea just who had committed this week's murder—and why.

Well, but now certain developments made it necessary for Eric to kill his wife, Mildred.

He could remember the days when he had called Mildred Milly, and had kept his arm around her almost always; but those days were long gone. She was Mildred now, and whenever he could help it, which was usually, she was at least ten or twelve arm's lengths away from him.

From that distance, she complained. Constantly.

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"All you think of is those mysteries," she whined. "Remember when we were married? Remember what you said then? You said you'd write political columns and commentaries and every four years help pick the next president."

"Know any columnist who makes as much money as I do?" Eric asked.

"Know any columnist who says *yessir* as much as you do?" Mildred countered. "*Ding-a-ling*. 'Hello,' says you. 'It's your editor,' says the phone. 'It's your producer,' says the phone. 'It's your publisher,' says the phone. 'It's your agent,' says the phone. 'Oh,' says you. 'Yessir,' says you. 'Anything you want,' says you. 'Different victim?' says you. 'New perpetrator?' says you. 'New clue?' says you. 'No problem,' says you. 'I'll get right to it,' says you. 'Hey Eric,' says me. 'Shut up, I'm busy,' says you. 'Gotta do this rewrite,' says you. 'Gotta have him stabbed with an icicle, and then the icicle melts,' says you. 'But listen, Eric,' says me. 'Get away, I'm busy,' says you. 'Eric, Eric,' says me, 'we've got tickets for Liza Minelli's new play tonight.' 'Get away,' says you. 'I'm busy,' says you. 'Rewrite,' says you. 'Deadline,' says you. Eric, Eric, why don't you tell them all to go to hell, them and their rewrites and their deadlines?!!"

Well! Well!

That sort of imperviousness to the needs of a working man would itself be sufficient motive for murder—but Eric had lately come across another reason for doing away with the former Milly.

The name of this new motive for Mildred's murder was Fifi Lovejoy, a name more fitting than even Eric himself had ever been able to dream up for any siren or cocotte or inamorata in even the most sizzling of his murder mysteries.

Fifi was the receptionist at the film studio's office, though she was usually not at her desk, but somewhere nearby, talking to . . . well, to Eric Bessemer, for one.

Fifi was two inches shorter than Eric's five feet ten, which put her wiggly blond hair just about at his hungry mouth; she walked toward him with her breasts waving *Hi there, you* and away from him with her rump weeping an up-and-down goodbye. If he said he was interested in baseball, she said, "Oh, really? Wonderful! I love baseball! All those little white pillows on the field and all those advertisements on the fences and those players' salaries and those hot dogs and everything!"

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And, oh, yes, she thought Eric's films were great. She said so. She said, "Hey, I'm on page three of that new script of yours, and wow!" Page three. That was the page of each new script of his that she had just reached each time he came into the office. And she told him so—that is, after she had left the director or actor or gofer she was talking to at the time, and had come back to her desk to talk to Eric.

And by now, Fifi and Eric had gone out together—out of the office, that is, and into a nearby motel Fifi happened to know about—and there Fifi proved she loved him by allowing him to love her.

And love her he did.

After all, she did not, like Mildred, say things like, *When are you going to do something important? When are you going to stop letting those emforgodsakeployers make you work work work all the time?*

No. Fifi's way with him was much more admiring, as when, for example, she said that wow, she had happened to see the payroll accounts, and well, golly whiz, did Eric realize he earned as much as one of those there baseball players, one of those center basemen or second fielders or whatever, and wow golly, she loved him.

The day Fifi said that, they went again to the motel, but then afterward, she said with tears in her eyes that they couldn't do this anymore, it was an immoral sin, and oh, oh, wasn't there something he could do about it?

"Hmmm," he said.

"I'll try to figure something out," he said.

But he had a problem.

Long ago, when he was a boy, the stern tight-lipped mother who brought him up had taught him (and his father) that divorce was immoral.

So, well, okay, if he was to have blond hairs on his pillowslip for the rest of his life, there was nothing he could do but murder Mildred.

Therefore, he planned it. He used the expertise he had been developing for years at his word processor, and oh, he was clever, oh, he was astute, because, for one thing, Mildred herself was going to give him an alibi.

And she did.

Oh, she did indeed.

She began helping him with this alibi as soon as he told her—with a straight face, mind you—that in the coming summer, he thought they should rent a beautiful cottage on the shore of, well, probably

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Westport, Connecticut, where various friends of Mildred's spent their vacations.

Mildred said immediately, "What? Oh! Hey! Wow!" And she went to the phone and sang into it: "Rachel? Oh, I've got a see-cret, I've got a see-cret . . ." And: "Sally? Guess where I'll be spending the summer vacation!?" And: "Debbie? I'm going to be your *neighbor* this summer!"

Good. Fine. Now all Eric had to do was to start setting up his alibi.

So: he started telling a number of people, every friend, every neighbor, and several workers at the publishing company and at the magazine and at the film studio, that on the coming Thursday, the day of the week when Mildred always had a date to play bridge with her friends, he would be going up to Westport, Connecticut, to look over some real estate. The evidence of all these people would confirm his alibi.

Okay. Fine as far as it went. What these individuals knew, or thought they knew, would lend credence to the more direct testimony of others that he had indeed been elsewhere when the murder was committed.

All right. Now he went to the bottom drawer of the desk in his study—a drawer into which he was in the habit of throwing useless old things, one of these being the extra key to the front door of the building next to his, a building in which he had lived until the money started rolling in and he had bought the condominium he and Mildred now lived in. He had forgotten to give this extra key to the landlord next door, who did not know of its existence, since Eric himself had had it made—and here it bloody well was in this drawer full of junk. Whee!

So at four in the morning, when no one would be likely to see him, he sneaked out of the bedroom he no longer shared with Mildred, went downstairs and out past the snoozing doorman, and up the three steps to the door of his former apartment building (which had no doorman at all) and tried the key. It worked. It still worked. It opened the door. Whee! Whee!

He returned then, sneaking past the still sleeping doorman in the lobby of his present residence, and went back up in the elevator to his top-floor condo.

He had not been seen.

He had not been heard.

And the key still worked.

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He had only to wait now until next Thursday, the last day when Mildred would deface this otherwise lovely planet.

Next Thursday came. It did. It seemed to take about ten months for this to happen, but next Thursday did come.

He sat down to eat what would be his last breakfast ever with Mildred, and he listened to all her fulminations for what would be the very last time.

"Well," she said, "I'm glad you're going up to Westport. Find us a real nice house, okay? View of the beach. Two bathrooms. Comfortable, right? Oh—and don't sign any lease till I get up there and look at it, because I know you, all you'll care about is whether it's got an office for your word processor." She shook her head exasperatedly, then said: "Listen: you know what I don't understand?"

"What?"

"Why you worked all day yesterday on that script. I mean, you could have told them you were going up to Westport for *two* days."

"I had to get the script to them before five-thirty yesterday," said Eric. "A contract is a contract."

"A contract is a way of keeping you—*and* your wife—from having any fun," said Mildred. "Matter of fact, yesterday, with no bridge game, I could have gone with you. Er . . . think you'll be back by four? The bridge party doesn't start until then. Four, okay?"

"Not a chance," said Eric. "I'll be much later."

"Darn," said Mildred. "Darn! You could have gone yesterday and taken me, but oh, no! You preferred to punch that word processor."

"I had to finish the script and get it to them," said Eric.

"Script! Script! Short story! Mystery novel! It's all you think of! I bet you'll even be writing those things up there in Westport. You'll call it a vacation, but you'll work work work!"

Eric didn't argue with her. After today, he would never have to listen to her imprecations. Tomorrow he would be free, because this was it! This was the day!

It was 9:30 when he finished breakfast.

It was 9:38 when he took his car from the garage.

It was 10:09 when he parked the car in a space near the 125th Street railway stop.

It was 10:42 when a cab deposited him back downtown at Grand Central Station.

It was 10:44 when he got into a phone booth, called the mystery magazine, got the editor, and told him that oh gee whiz, he was at

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Grand Central Station, just about to take a train to Westport, but he had suddenly realized that he needed to make an important change in the story they were to be sending to the presses this week.

The editor said, "I thought the story was pretty good. What's this change?"

"Well, if the guy the murderess kills to get the property was the guy she'd been in love with in college, and she knew it, then she just couldn't pull the trigger. So I'm going to have him changed, have him get a plastic surgeon to make him, oh, humpbacked or something, and long-nosed and redheaded and swollen-cheeked, so he'll be pretty sure he's fooling her into giving this supposed innocent stranger the money for a half share in the estate that isn't his at all, whereas *she, not* recognizing him, kills him to get the whole estate that he doesn't own. And then she finds that out, and finds out that he's the man she loves, and she's killed him. Good, huh?"

"Well, yeah, yeah, I guess it is."

"But I've got to get it to you by tomorrow night, and here I am on my way to Westport, so look: can you send the story by messenger, fast fast, to the One-Twenty-Fifth-Street Station, and have him page me when my train stops there, and give me the manuscript?"

"Well . . . gosh . . . Look: how much time do we have?"

"The train will be there at eleven forty-five. And, hey, listen, maybe to hurry it up, you could send Ms. McIntyre, your secretary. . . ."

"Hmm . . . Well, yeah, sure. Yuh. Okay." And the editor was yelling for his secretary as he hung up.

That was it.

Beautifully plotted by the best murder-thinker-upper in the world.

So: Eric took the train to—supposedly—Westport.

It stopped at 125th Street.

From where he sat, in the most crowded car, he could hear Ms. McIntyre, two cars down, shouting: "Mr. Bessemer! Mr. Eric Bessemer!!"

And he sat there waiting until she was nearly up to his car. Then he rose, and said loudly: "Is someone calling Mr. Eric Bessemer?"

A passenger said: "Eric *Bessemer?* The writer?"

"Yes, yes. That's me." (He did not add: *And you're a witness.*)

Ms. McIntyre entered the car at that moment, but did not at first see Eric Bessemer, because he was suddenly surrounded by

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passengers saying, *Uh, Mr. Bessemer . . . Autograph, please? . . . I love your stories, Mr. Bessemer . . .*

But Ms. McIntyre pushed through this small gang and handed Eric the package containing his manuscript.

"Whew!" she said. "Here's your story, Mr. Bessemer. Look, I'd better get off the train . . ."

"Gangway!" said Bessemer. "Let me help this lady off! And I've got to go up front anyhow. Gangway!"

And stuffing the manuscript into his briefcase, he followed her out of the railroad car.

She threw him a kiss and jumped off the train—and Eric waved, then continued through the next car, and got off it slowly, looking back along the platform toward Ms. McIntyre, who thank heaven was hurrying away from him toward the stairway to the street; and just to be on the safe side, he hid behind a post as the train started up and Ms. McIntyre started down.

In a matter of seconds, he was alone on the platform.

Whee! Everything had worked perfectly.

He waited, smiling, almost dancing, until Ms. McIntyre must surely be in a cab or a subway car, and then went downstairs and outside, found his car where he had parked it earlier, got into it, and drove it downtown.

He knew a public parking lot that not everyone else knew, a fairly small tucked-away section of Riverside Park, not many blocks from his Riverside Drive address—and sure enough, in that lot there was a space for his car.

He parked it; he took the revolver from under the seat and hid it in his briefcase, under the bundle containing the manuscript Ms. McIntyre had given him.

And as he got out, he carried the briefcase.

He locked the car door.

And he walked out to Riverside Drive, and on up it toward the scene-to-be of the most satisfying murder he had ever plotted.

No one seemed to be coming out or going into his building, or (even more importantly) the building next to his.

So: he went up the three steps, used the long-forgotten key to the building he had once lived in, and took the elevator to the roof. Both buildings were seventeen stories tall, since their builders had built them at the same time—and only a short stone wall stood between their roofs.

He scaled it.

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And here he was, home, unseen by his doorman or anyone else, one story above the scene of his coming liberation.

He nodded. He smiled. He went through the door to the stairs, walked down one flight, took his apartment key from his pocket, put it in the keyhole, and . . .

And stopped for a moment.

Smiled for a moment.

Reflected for a moment.

People could swear he had gone to Westport, and, indeed, he would do so—by car—the moment his task was finished. Ms. McIntyre could testify that he was on the train long since gone. Some signature-seekers could confirm this. The real-estate people in Westport would tell of his visits to them.

My God, he was a smart plotter!

He took the gun from his briefcase, putting it in his pocket, then opened the door very very quietly.

Closed it, just as quietly.

Listened.

He heard Mildred's voice, speaking from somewhere toward the back of the apartment, somewhere—yes, yes, from his office, where she was talking on the phone.

He crept closer, down the corridor, his hand on the revolver in his pocket. She'd be through with this call in a minute, and then . . .

Mildred's voice came to him quite clearly now.

"Well, no, Ms. Lovejoy . . . no . . . "

Ms. Lovejoy! Fifi!

"No, you see, Ms. Lovejoy, he's already left for Westport. . . . The company knew he was going there, didn't they? Well, there you are. You'll have to tell Mr. Sanford that he's gone already. . . . No, there's no way of reaching him. . . . What's that? Oh. Oh, well, what's this other writer's name? I see. . . . Yes, I have it. . . . I'll tell my husband when he returns tonight, Ms. Lovejoy. I'm sure he'll understand about the other writer. I mean, what else could you do with my husband out of town? Okay. Thank you. Goodbye."

Other writer!?

Eric pushed into the office. Mildred was just rising from the desk.

"What was all that about?" said Eric. "Other writer!? What the hell . . . ?"

"Oh, where'd you come from, Eric?"

"Other writer?"

"Did you miss the train?"

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"Never mind the verblungety train! What's this about another writer? *What* other writer, and for what reason?"

"Oh. Fella named Tom Altman. He's gonna rewrite your script, this week's script, because they have to do it in a hurry, they're shooting day after tomorrow, and with you in Westport today . . ."

"I'm not in Westport! Give me that phone!"

He pushed past her, grabbed the phone, dialed—and while she was crying out, *Don't! Don't call him! Let him think you're in Westport*, Eric said into the phone, "Mr. Sanford, please, emergency," then drummed his fingers on the desk while Mildred kept saying, *Westport!* and *Hang up! Don't bother with those people! Never mind Mr. Sanford! Don't do what he wants! Do what you want! Just hang up! Forget it! Let him think you're in Westport!*

Then came Eddie Sanford's voice on the phone: "Hello?"

"Eddie! Eddie, this is Eric Bessemer. I . . . Look, something wrong with the script? I mean . . ."

"Hey, Eric, I thought you were out of town someplace."

"Well, I'm not. Now, what's this about the script?"

"It needs work, Eric. Not your fault. Only, look, you laid it in Florida, and . . . Well, just guess what happened? Guess who we signed for it? Benny Quinlan! Benny Quinlan, hey, imagine that!"

"The Olympic ski champion?"

"Yeah! How's *about* that? *Box Office!*"

"Can he act?"

"He's *Box Office!* But, well, see, all those car chases down in Florida are gonna have to be changed to tricky breathtaking *ski* chases in the mountains of Vermont. So . . . Well, we gotta rewrite."

"It's my script. Did you talk to Tom Altman yet?"

"No. I was just gonna call him."

"Well, don't. Now, look, I'll get to it right away. Have it for you by tomorrow P.M. at the latest."

"Oh, wonderful! Wonderful! Look, Eric, we better say goodbye and you get busy, right?"

"Right." And they hung up.

Mildred was yammering at him as he turned to the smaller desk where he kept his word processor. He pulled it toward him and then rose to go to the closet, where he kept his reams of paper, Mildred all the time saying, *My God, aren't the real-estate people expecting you in Westport*, he all the time ignoring her as he got out paper, adjusted the desk light, and then, about the time she was saying, *Where's your sense of fitness? I mean, this instead of Westport, damn*

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it, he was saying to her, "Look, Mildred, there's something I want you to do. . . ." and he pulled from a drawer the story he had rewritten yesterday before he'd called Ms. McIntyre's boss and told him he'd rewrite it today. "Here," he said to Mildred. "Wait about two hours and then call Ms. McIntyre at the magazine. Tell her I decided to come back home and do this, it was so important—but she'll have to send a messenger, I'm too busy with another rewrite to bring it in myself, but it's all done, so a messenger, all right?"

"All right? All right? What the hell is all right around here? I just heard you say you'd be busy till late tomorrow, so you won't go to Westport tomorrow, either, right? Right? Right?"

"Right," said Eric. "Certainly not tomorrow."

"*Damn* you!" And out she went, slamming the door behind her.

Eric shrugged, then, turning to the word processor, he said half-aloud: "Let's see . . . Scene One. FADE IN ON A MOUNTAIN IN VERMONT . . ."

But then the phone rang. He picked it up and said, "Hello."

"Eric? Harry Willis here." His book publisher now. "Listen, Eric, your book is great except for the alibi you give your villain. I mean, nobody can vouch for him. He's a suspect, what good would it do for him to say he was someplace else at the time with no confirmation? They'd arrest him. He's gotta have witnesses backing him up."

"Wait a minute," said Eric. "I see your point, but look: suppose he goes on a train, see, and has a messenger deliver something to him at a stop—maybe just at One-Twenty-Fifth Street. Anyway, then he jumps off the train, commits the murder, and everybody thinks he's in Chicago or somewhere. Witnesses. And later he gets there by plane, under a different name, and people are testifying he was on the train. How's about that?"

"Great! Can you get it to me by Wednesday?"

"No problem." He hung up, and as he turned toward his word processor, the door opened again.

"I'll tell you this," Mildred said. "As long as you care about what all those editors and producers and publishers want you to do, you'll never do anything that you yourself really want."

And the door slammed again.

Eric sighed.

He took the revolver from his pocket, emptied it of its bullets, and threw them into the wastebasket.

"All right, where was I?" said Eric. Then: "Oh, yeah—Mountain in Vermont . . ." ●

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Marianne Strong is a published author of non-fiction who recently made her fiction debut in our sister publication, Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine. *She is a resident of Silver Spring, Maryland, and a teacher of English literature. In this second story, she takes us to a mining town in Pennsylvania, where a local artist who has made it big mysteriously becomes a target for vandals . . .*

BLUE ICE

by MARIANNE STRONG

Stan Odysek stood stock-still in the doorway of Catherine Krushank's lake chalet at Laurel Run. Deputy Sheriff Mike Flynn, unprepared for the sudden stop, bumped into his boss.

"Jeez," Mike breathed on Stan's neck. "Holy cow."

"Yeah," Stan said. But this vandalism had nothing of the pastoral and less of the sacred. Unless . . . An image came into Stan's head from a college course he'd taken in world literature. The pit of Dante's inferno. A vast frozen lake with a huge, hairy Satan flapping his wings to escape the ice that locked him in up to his waist.

Only the hairy thing caught in this ice wasn't alive. Nor very big. Just strange, distorted. Like everything else on the floor of the room. Covered by blue ice. Blue ice in chunks, in thin sheets, in knobbed icicles.

"Jeez."

From behind, a puff of condensed breath floated past Stan's right ear.

Yielding to Mike's second bump, Stan moved gingerly onto the iced wooden floor of the chalet's seven-hundred-square-foot living room. He picked his way to the middle, where he knelt and examined the animal. It was a squirrel. Its fur had frozen into blue spikes. Its

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head tilted to one side and through a thin layer of blue ice a round eye stared up at Stan.

"Poor devil," Stan muttered. "How'd he get caught in this?"

"What?" Five feet away, Mike took a step toward Stan from a blue frozen throw rug that crunched beneath his feet. He slid on the icy floor. "Damn it," he said as he grabbed at a chair and thudded to the floor. The chair landed on top of him. "Damn it."

From where she still stood in the doorway, Catherine Krushank spoke. "Maybe I should have called the rescue squad instead. But the squirrel looked dead."

Stan stood up and faced the woman. In his shock at the appearance of the room, he'd almost forgotten about her. Almost, but not quite. One couldn't quite forget Catherine Krushank.

But she'd switched her attention to Mike. A smile played across her face.

Stan might have been amused, too, if he knew for sure Mike wasn't hurt, and if he didn't dislike this woman as much as he did.

He walked over and held out a hand to Mike. "You okay?"

"Yeah." Mike adjusted his hat and his dignity. "Watch your step. Damn place is an ice rink."

"I noticed." Stan turned back to the woman. "Miss Krushank, as far as you can tell, is anything missing?"

The woman shivered in a blast of wind from the lake that blew silk strands of banana-blond hair across her cheekbones. She pulled the door shut.

Stan smiled. "You'll have to leave it open. Not enough light with it shut." He hoped another blast would whip around her, but he found it hard to believe that she felt cold. He doubted she had the blood to get cold.

"How can I tell if anything is missing? It's impossible, as you can see for yourself." She waved an arm around the big room, then pulled her ink-blue cape tightly about her slim body. "If your deputy can manage to lift up those shades, there'll be plenty of light and we can close the door."

Mike slid and shuffled his way to the east wall on the right of the chalet's entrance and tugged at the shades. Finally, one shot up and wrapped itself around its spool.

Catherine Krushank sighed, walked steady as a rock to the windows, and drew up another shade.

Through the six-foot windows, light poured over the thin layer of blue ice that covered the floor.

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"You paint in here?" Stan asked.

"Yes, obviously." Miss Krushank waved an arm at the windows. "I had the room designed for it." She pulled a black scarf from around her neck, then yanked more silky blond hair from her cape collar and shook it down her back.

Stan remembered the gesture. She had used it throughout high school. To defy the head nun, rejecting the nun's interest in her painting. To shoo away fellow students she considered too stupid or clumsy or untalented to warrant her company. To shake off the unwanted attentions from adoring boys, himself included. When he was thirteen, he'd found the gesture sexy. He still did.

He cleared his throat and forced his eyes off Catherine Krushank's perfect heart-shaped face. "And you found the room like this on your return?"

"Again, obviously. As I told your secretary."

Stan began to wish Miss Krushank would slip on the ice and land on her dupa. It would snap his brain out of its regression to his thirteenth year. "How long had you been away?"

"Three days."

"Where?"

"New York. For a new showing of some of my canvases. And I returned today for a local showing. Why?"

"Was it common knowledge that you would be gone?" he asked. Ignoring Miss Krushank's question made him feel a little more like Philip Marlowe instead of Stanley Chester Odysek, sheriff of Bloomsville, son of Bloomsville's baker.

"Probably." Catherine Krushank shrugged. "I don't associate much with the neighbors. I come here to work. But Hedwig, my maid, naturally knows when I won't be here, and undoubtedly she gossiped."

"You know that from experience or do all maids named Hedwig gossip?"

From across the room where he was still hanging on to a table, Mike smirked.

Miss Krushank tossed her hair. "How is that question pertinent, Mr. Odysek?"

Stan figured that whatever ice had melted in the sun from the windows had just refrozen. "It was meant to be impertinent," he mumbled. He gestured to the door and raised his voice. "The door shows obvious signs of tampering. A crude break-in. Not professional, but then your lock is pretty flimsy, Miss Krushank. You've

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been victimized by some local teenage vandals or by someone with a grudge who wanted to make life miserable for you. Any enemies in the area?"

She shrugged. "Plenty in New York. None here that I know of. As I said, I keep to myself. Maybe I've disgruntled one or two local workmen, but nothing serious."

"As you see it. The disgruntled ones might feel differently. Make me a list of anyone you've argued with in the last several months."

Feeling pretty good, Stan took his eyes from Miss Krushank's perfect face and walked over to the kitchen area. A blue glacier blocked the inside of the sink, and a frozen blue cascade draped over the sides. "Kinda pretty," he mumbled.

He turned to his deputy. "Mike, collect a chunk of ice. I don't care what you put it in. Even if it melts, we can still get an analysis. I want to know what the vandal used to turn the water blue."

"Maybe the water contains some sort of mineral," Mike suggested.

Stan shook his head. "Not enough to make the water this bright a blue. Someone did this deliberately, God only knows why. Probably used food dye, but I want an analysis. Take the sample to the chemistry department at Bloomsville College."

Mike nodded, shuffled his way to the sink, took out a pocket knife, and began hacking at a chuck of ice.

Stan turned to Miss Krushank, not unhappy to notice that, caught off guard, she looked worried and a little frightened. "Miss Krushank, when you left, did you leave the water on with all the faucets closed?"

Miss Krushank's face locked into an expression of pained superiority. "I left the faucets dripping to prevent the pipes from bursting."

He nodded. "All right." Stan figured that whoever broke in and loaded dye into the pipes had tightened the faucets. He had no doubt that Miss Krushank was neither stupid nor inefficient enough to commit so human an error as he had suggested, but he'd enjoyed asking anyway. "Mike," he said, "stop at the security gate and try to get a plumber up here this afternoon. I want to know where and how the dye was put into the pipes. Miss Krushank, I want to look around some more, talk to the neighbors. I'll secure the door when I leave. Where can I reach you?"

"I'll check into a local hotel and leave the number with your secretary."

"Okay. You understand that if local vandals did this, we'll likely never pin them down. If someone did this for personal reasons . . ."

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Stan paused. "Maybe we can track them down if you'll tell me who has something against you."

Miss Krushank's blue eyes looked frightened again. She wrapped her arms around herself. Against the expanse of white frozen ground outside the window, she looked as small as the squirrel that had died in the ice. "I can't even guess at any personal reason."

Stan nodded, trying not to feel too protective. "Most people can't imagine anyone that angry with them." He looked around at the blue-ice floor into which the furniture, painting easels, lamps, and squirrel had frozen. "Why blue, Miss Krushank?" he said. "Can you guess at that?"

Miss Krushank's eyes jolted wide open. "I paint in blue," she said. "It's my signature color."

Stan sighed. He'd known this was no easy vandal job. Somebody had it in for Miss Krushank and he'd have to delay his week's vacation at his own mountain retreat, a shack compared to this one, but his. No doubt by the time he cleared this up or gave it up, the weather would shift and melt enough snow to make cross-country skiing impossible. Miss Krushank was ruining his life again. He'd have to find out a whole lot more about her than he wanted to know. Maybe her paintings would tell him something.

"Miss Krushank," he said, "where is the local showing of your work?"

"Bloomsville College Art Gallery. Downtown."

"Okay. Let my secretary know where you are. And, Miss Krushank, get me that list of disgruntled people."

Miss Krushank nodded and left with a toss of her hair but no further words.

"Sort of like a Doberman, isn't she," Mike said.

"A Doberman?"

"Sleek dogs. Beautiful. You'd like to own one, but you know it'll bite."

"Yeah." Stan stared at the floor. "Mike, do squirrels swim?"

"This one didn't. Poor animal. He's the real victim."

"Yeah." Through the window, Stan watched Catherine Krushank trying to reach her car by the narrow path they had made trampling through the snow earlier. "Let's hope he stays the only victim." Stan looked around at the blue ice. The squirrel had come in looking for warmth. But there wasn't any in this place. Beauty, but no warmth.

* * *

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The Bloomsville Gallery had draped a five-foot white sheet between the Corinthian pillars of the front veranda. The local printer had embossed large blue letters on the sheet: CATHERINE KRUSHANK: FIRST LOCAL SHOWING.

Stan stood at the bottom of the entrance stairs and stared at the sign. Catherine Krushank was what some people would call a bitch. And years ago, she'd looked through Stan as if he hadn't existed. But that didn't stop him from enjoying this irony. A lowly Pole, representative of the last group of immigrants to Bloomsville, the last group to work the mines and do the town's laundry and the town's baking, now had a sign with her name hung over the Grecian entranceway to the Wentworth mansion. The Wentworth payroll had probably given Catherine Krushank's father his week's wages in return for scratching out ten tons of coal on his knees. And the Wentworth department store had taken the wages back.

For a minute, Stan loved Catherine Krushank again. She'd won for every kid whose father had coughed his lungs out in the Wentworth mines.

Maybe some tormented soul of the Wentworth line had taken revenge with the blue ice.

The white sheet snapped in the cold wind that blasted up North Street. Stan took the steps by twos.

Inside the foyer, a radiator pumped out masses of moist hot air. Stan basked in it for a moment, then wiped his shoes on the stiff welcome mat. He'd been in every museum along the Mediterranean from the Prado to the Topkapi in his navy stint, but this was the Wentworth mansion. And inside was Catherine Krushank's work.

Then he noticed that the marble floor had cracks and dirt had settled in them, permanently. He stopped wiping his shoes and pushed through the double glass doors of the foyer.

The woman at the oak trestle table looked up from her book.

Stan gaped, twisted his body halfway toward the doors to escape, then caught hold of himself. Hell, he'd looked down the throats of Soviet gunboats in 'Nam. Didn't matter. This was worse.

"Uh," he began. "Hello. Uh . . ." What did you call an ex-nun anyway? One who'd terrorized you in the fourth grade. And why the hell, after he'd had three good years back in Bloomsville, was the past coughing up all its old stale air.

With a click, one of the glass doors settled into its accustomed slot behind Stan. Sister Mary Adolphina, Adolf they'd called her, had slammed the door of the fourth-grade homeroom once. Slammed

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it so hard, the glass window popped out and shattered. Stan was occupying the front seat because he'd hung a sign with a vulgar word out of the back window of the room down to the second-grade window. A piece of glass had skidded across the floor and stuck into the toe of his white bucks. He'd been the hero of the whole school, showing around that piece of glass. Even Catherine Krushank had looked.

"Uh . . ." The only name he could think of was Adolf.

"It's three dollars to get in." Ex-Sister Mary Adolphina lowered her head over her book again.

Now he'd advanced to the eighth grade and was standing outside Adolf's office. She'd advanced to the principal's position. He'd drawn a picture of St. Thomas Aquinas. As a dumb ox. Sitting on Sister Mary Adolphina. He was waiting to apologize and take his punishment. The whacks on the back of his head didn't worry him. It was this waiting, staring at Sister's black back because you weren't allowed into her office before eight-thirty. Even to get whacks.

Stan dug into his pocket and pulled out his wallet. Ignoring the identification that would have let him in free, and identified him to ex-Sister Mary Adolphina, he fumbled for three dollars.

Adolf took them and smoothed them into a little box, dropping a weight on them to hold them down. On her fleshless white hands, the blue veins slid back and forth.

Unexpectedly embarrassed, Stan turned away and walked down a wainscoted hall to the first room on the right. He stepped in, turning his head to the left for a glimpse of ex-Sister Mary Adolphina.

"Christ," he mumbled. "What's she doing here?" Then he remembered. Ruthy, back at the office, had come in one day too excited to type. She'd told him Adolf was back in town. He hadn't listened very well. He'd been too busy persuading Joe not to go after the kids who'd taken his car for a joyride, and not to blast them into kingdom come. Joe and his Irish temper.

Stan shook his head. Next time he'd listen to Ruthy. She had all the news, all the time.

Stan stepped into the Wentworth's drawing room, looked around, and remembered why he'd come.

Blue ice.

On the wall in front of him hung a Krushank painting. Five figures crowded the lower right-hand side of the canvas. Two women and three children. Two of the children smiled at each other, and

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the women behind them draped their arms protectively around the shoulders of the children.

The heads of the five figures led upward to a woman on the left of the canvas. She was tall, thin, and blue. She was ice and death to the other group's warmth and life.

Stan peered at the ice figure. The resemblance to Sister Adolphina was subtle, but unmistakable.

Stan let out a low whistling breath.

He walked to the next painting. In it a woman sat at a desk, facing the viewer. Behind her, the viewer had a glimpse of a street with several figures in warm sienna and cinnamon colors. The only blue in the painting hovered around the woman. It touched the edges of the paper she held. It haloed her hair and shadowed her hands. It locked her in.

Stan breathed out again, and let his eyes follow the line of paintings around the wall. Three more paintings held the blue woman, frozen, alive and dead at the same time.

Stan turned to the wall through whose door he had entered, expecting to find more blue ice.

His eyes locked onto Sister Adolphina's.

She stood in the doorway, watching him.

Big blue eyes stared at Stan, not ice blue, not translucent, like the ice at Catherine Krushank's chalet, but blueblack, like the waters of Pennsylvania's deep lakes.

Stan felt as if he were staring down into some deep well, into some unspeakable dark eddy, disturbed by something that writhed at the bottom.

He remembered seeing eyes like that at wakes, wakes for people who had died young in car accidents, or for men who had died mutilated in a war.

Sister Mary Adolphina opened her mouth, closed it again, and pulled the collar of her blue-black coat tightly around her neck.

"Sheriff Odysek," she said.

Stan nodded, unsure whether he'd been asked or told.

"I see." She took a deep breath. "Then you know." She lifted her eyes to the ceiling. "And that means you'll tell Catherine. I must get there first." She turned and walked out of the room.

"What the hell?" Stan muttered. He thought a minute and realized what had happened. Adolf had recognized him and knew he'd put two and two together. She'd taken revenge on Catherine for these paintings. He uprooted his feet and dashed into the hall.

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The gallery door stood open.

Stan ran out onto the steps and checked the street, both right and left.

To the left, a blue Ford Escort turned the corner right from North Street onto High Street.

Stan memorized the plate number: 22124J.

He pulled up his own collar and started out at a trot for his office.

At the office, Ruthy was retyping colored tabs for her files, a favorite activity.

"Mike here yet?" Stan asked, slapping his upper arms to get some warmth into them.

Ruthy swung round in the typing chair she seldom left. "Yeah. He's in the john." She crooked her head at her boss. "What are you onto?"

"Did you have Sister Adolphina in school?"

"Sure. Everybody did. I was her student secretary. In charge of the files."

"I didn't know she'd left the nunnery."

Ruthy frowned. "She hasn't."

The door to the john opened and closed. "Hi, Stan." Mike picked up a sheet of paper and waved it at Stan. "Lab work from Bloomsville College. Blue food dye. Just like you thought. Sold in every supermarket in the state. Plumber said whoever did it just dropped the dye in the well and turned on the faucets. Didn't take any special—"

Stan held up a hand to Mike, like a traffic cop holding back a line of cars. "What do you mean she hasn't left the convent?"

Ruthy set down the red tabs she'd just labeled "Hunting Crimes," a label she considered redundant. "She hasn't. But she's very sick. Dying of cancer, so she's come to live with her sister now. They're close. The only two sisters left of a big family. Sister Adolphina came to stay with her sister about a month ago. That's when I told you about it."

"Do you know if her sister works at the Wentworth Gallery?"

Ruthy looked at Stan as if he'd just learned that the earth was round. "Sure. Has for two months. To help with expenses for poor Sister Adolphina, I expect."

Mike's head swung from Stan to Ruthy like a tennis fan's.

Stan nodded. "And Catherine Krushank's paintings went up two weeks ago." Suddenly he thought of those eyes that looked as if

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something writhed beneath them, and of the car headed up High Street, straight out of town and up to the lake.

He hoped Ruthy's census bureau knowledge of the townspeople held up. "Ruthy, what's the sister's name?"

Ruthy folded her arms and lowered her head. In a minute, she looked up triumphantly. "Dorothy. Dorothy Olshewski."

Stan waved at Ruthy's telephone. "Find out where she lives. Call her. See if she's home. And get her license number."

"What's up?" Mike asked, his eyes wide.

"Catherine Krushank may be in trouble. I know who iced her place. I don't know if revenge or hate or anger or all three prompted it, but whichever, the feelings are still running awfully high. And the woman knows I'm onto her. If she's gone up to the lake, she's after Catherine Krushank. Ruthy, did Krushank call and tell you where she's staying?"

"Yes, the Skytop Inn at the lake."

Stan grabbed the other outside phone and dialed the Skytop.

Ruthy carried out her tasks with one ear cocked toward Stan.

She piped up as soon as Stan put down the receiver. "So Krushank isn't at the hotel?"

"No. Damn. The clerk said she'd gone over to her chalet to get something. And Olshewski isn't home, right?"

Ruthy nodded and picked up a yellow pad. "Her license number is 22124J."

Stan zipped his jacket back up and glanced at his watch, figuring he had maybe half an hour to stop Dorothy Olshewski. "I'm going up there. Maybe Catherine will get what she wants and clear out before Olshewski gets to her. But maybe she won't."

Mike raised his brows to his brown curly hairline. "How do you know Olshewski's gone up there?"

"I don't know for sure. But if someone had rubbed me that raw, I'd go after them." He stepped outside and yanked the door shut.

A light snow slicked High Street and began coating it pretty well just at the edge of town where it narrowed, curved, and turned into Skytop Road.

Stan skidded once across the highway, cursed, pumped the brakes, righted the Chevy patrol car, and started up again, twenty miles an hour slower.

Olshewski had a head start, and in clear weather to begin with, but she'd still be on the road, too, and forced to slow down.

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Twenty minutes of alternate snow squalls and half-inch flakes floating down as if they had a year to make it to the ground brought Stan to Northumberland Road and the entrance to the community where Catherine Krushank had her chalet.

One set of grey mushy car tracks marred the snow on Northumberland Road. Stan risked picking the speed up another five miles. He still wasn't sure whether he wanted to be the hero to Catherine, Ivanhoe to her blond Rowena, or whether he wanted to stop Dorothy Olshewski from wrecking whatever remained of her life. And of her sister's.

He slowed for a curve and banked the car gently round. In front of him, the grey tracks zigzagged across the road. But the wheels had never spun off onto the shoulders that sloped toward the thick pine trees. Dorothy Olshewski knew how to drive.

Stan pumped the brakes. Ahead, the black and white bar of the gatehouse to Laurel Run barred entry.

A paunchy guard with a very red nose stepped out of the gatehouse and watched Stan approach.

Stan rolled down the window. "Official business. Open that gate."

The guard leaned toward Stan's open window. The corner of his eyes ticked. "What is it, Sheriff, more vandalism? I've been right here all the time. Like I'm supposed to be. I checked everybody who . . ."

"A woman in a blue Ford Escort?"

"Yeah. She's okay, though. Visits the Wentworths every now and then. She—"

"Open that gate now!"

The guard stumbled back against the gatehouse, his watery eyes ticking and blinking. He reached in and pulled a lever. The gate flew up.

Stan gritted his teeth in an effort to keep his foot from hitting the gas pedal too hard. He eased the patrol car ahead over the sleety road, passed the first two chalets, and rounded a curve where the lake and Catherine's chalet came into view.

The blue Escort sat halfway off the road, pointed at the chalet.

Stan pulled the patrol car alongside the Escort. He jumped out of the car and fished out of his pocket the key tagged with a white slip and the name Krushank.

Beneath his feet, the flagstone entry looked a sullen dark grey.

The lock clicked, and Stan shoved the door open. He stepped onto the blue ice, still caked over the chalet's floor.

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The sun was shifting now, moving toward the west, so the light filtered through the small west windows in a thin silvery film over the watercolor that sat on the easel by the big east windows.

Stan stared.

The eyes of the portrait gleamed with a metallic blue. Around the blond head, so blond it was almost white, blue icicles hung like a bizarre halo of blue ice thorns. Catherine Krushank's angelic face glared from the easel, like some Celtic maid who had fallen into a peat bog and frozen ten thousand years ago.

Stan took a step backward. His heel crunched a piece of ice.

Catherine had painted herself in the same bone-chilling and fearsome style she had used to paint Sister Adolphina. The same power and the same isolation stared out at Stan. Catherine Krushank could have been Sister Adolphina.

"Jesus," Stan muttered. He'd never seen the resemblance before.

A wedge of cold air blew against Stan's back from the open door.

"Miss Krushank," he called, waited a moment and wasted no more time.

He went back outside and checked the ground. A set of footsteps in the snow led away from the chalet toward the road. Another set led away from the chalet, around the back and toward the lake. Skytop Lake. Too deep to freeze over with more than a thin crust of ice. Last year, two kids had drowned there.

Stan moved around the chalet, lengthening his steps, then broke into a run, spattering the wet snow.

He followed the footsteps over the rim of the white icy backyard to the lake, deep blue-black against the mountains.

At the edge stood Dorothy Olshewski in her coat the same color as the lake.

Stan thought of the set of footprints that had led away from the chalet down the road. Dorothy Olshewski had let Catherine Krushank walk away.

Stan caught his breath and started down to the lake.

"Miss Olshewski," he said when he was ten feet away.

Dorothy Olshewski turned. Her deep blue eyes gleamed. With tears.

She nodded, as if congratulating herself on knowing exactly what Stan would do. "I thought you would guess," she said. "Once you saw the paintings."

Stan felt like a high school kid again, a kid who'd almost figured out the right answer to a trig problem.

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"Yeah," he said. "But I hadn't got it quite right. I thought you were . . ."

"My sister," Dorothy finished for him.

"Yeah, I didn't know . . ." He stopped, looked around toward the chalet, then up at the blue-black eyes again. "Why did you ice the place? Because of how she painted your sister?"

Dorothy's lips lifted into a curve that was more a gesture than a smile. A gesture that spoke of events so old and so human that no one who hadn't witnessed them could understand. "Because she painted her and didn't realize."

The wind blew down the hill at Stan's back. He rubbed his hands together. One only made the other colder. He wanted like hell to get back to his car. But he had to ask. It was his job. "Didn't realize what? That your sister has cancer?"

Dorothy looked past him, up to the chalet. "I wanted to hurt her. Catherine. To tell her. Maybe to warn her. I don't know anymore. But I wanted her to see that she was the same. Like blue ice."

Stan thought of the self-portrait Catherine had painted. He felt leftover myths from childhood shake and split as the ice on the lake would if you stepped on it. "The same as what?" he asked, half guessing.

"The same as my sister. Her mother."

"Mother?" he said stupidly, unwilling to believe.

"Ann . . ." Dorothy smiled again as if she were patiently explaining something to a very young child. "Ann, my sister, Sister Adolphina. She had a child. She was only seventeen. My mother and father sent her away to have the child. Then they made her give the child to my father's sister. She raised Catherine. To save the family from disgrace. To keep the sin hidden behind their righteous facade."

"But . . ." Stan said in protest. "Catherine went to school with me. We were in Adolf's . . . uh, Adolphina, Sister Adolphina's class together."

Dorothy nodded. "I told her to tell Catherine. To claim her daughter. But it was too late. She couldn't. Ann had frozen herself to bear it all, to stop the hurt. And she couldn't unfreeze."

"So all those years at the school, she watched her own daughter who didn't know?"

Dorothy nodded.

Stan thought of Catherine's haughty distance from Adolphina, from the other kids, from everyone. Absurdly he wanted to apologize

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for all the rotten tricks he'd pulled in school. And for thinking that Dorothy came up to hurt Catherine. "Is that why you came up today? Not to hurt Catherine, but to tell her?"

Dorothy nodded.

"Did you?"

"When I came in, she was still sketching a picture of herself. With blue ice. Like my sister."

Stan nodded. "What happened?"

"Nothing. How could I tell her? She's had no love. My aunt only wanted to prevent disgrace. Like my parents. How could she understand? What was the point in telling her? I made some excuse about needing to remind her about a reception at the gallery and I left."

Stan nodded again. How, he wondered, had this woman understood, how had she survived and kept alive her emotions, the only live being in a world of blue ice people? "Why did you come down to the lake after she left?" he asked.

Dorothy's eyes held no tears now. The blue-black seemed to pull Stan toward itself, like some blue-black star in space that had absorbed so much of the energy around itself that it could never reveal its own center. "Maybe to escape. Maybe to think. What will you do? Now that you know I damaged . . ."

"Well . . ." Stan interrupted. He shifted his feet again. He rubbed his hands. A little warmth crept back into them. He looked at them. They had reddened, a nice soft red. He looked up at the blue-black eyes. "I, uh, I'll have to warn the guard to watch out more carefully for vandals. They might do this to other houses."

Dorothy's blue-black eyes lightened a little. She nodded. "Thank you," she said, and walked past Stan, up the hill.

Stan watched her.

She stopped at the rim and turned to him. "Do you think I should tell her?"

Stan felt again as if he were in the eleventh grade, looking for the right answer to a knotty problem he hadn't really studied for. "Yeah," he said finally. "It might not help, but at least she'll have the right answer. To whatever questions she's had all these years."

Dorothy Olshewski nodded, pulled her collar around her neck, and headed toward the blue Escort.

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THE JURY BOX
by JON L. BREEN

When I was growing up in the 1950s, it was a firm rule (unwritten, unspoken, but nonetheless honored) that boys did not read girls' books. Thus, though I read the Hardy Boys with appreciation, I never cracked a Nancy Drew mystery, much as I was intrigued by their great titles. Now, all these years later, a reprinter has given me an excuse not just to revisit the Hardys but for the first time to see what a Drew book was like.

Applewood Press (distributed by Globe Pequot Press, Chester, CT 06412) has published facsimile editions of the first three books in each of the classic series at $12.95 per volume. The three Hardys, all first published in 1927, are *The Tower Treasure, The House on the Cliff,* and *The Secret of the Old Mill.* The first two have introductions by Leslie McFarlane, who wrote the early volumes in the series under the house name Franklin W. Dixon, while the third is introduced by William Tapply. The Drews, all 1930 and signed by Carolyn Keene, are (introducers in parentheses): *The Secret of the Old Clock* (Sara Paretsky), *The Hidden Staircase* (Nancy Pickard), and *The Bungalow Mystery* (P.M. Carlson). In later years, these books were revised and updated, toning down or eliminating some of the offensive racial and social views while also (say critics) rendering them rather bland and colorless. Applewood leaves the originals intact, with an appropriate disclaimer.

It's easy to see why today's mystery-writing feminists so love Nancy Drew. Despite the conventions of her time, she functions as a totally liberated woman (family wealth helps), who is always free to follow a mysterious scent and invariably survives unscathed her sometimes dubious judgment, typified by a tendency to drive her roadster or motorboat into gathering storms. Class-consciousness is rampant: in *The Bungalow Mystery,* one clue that a young woman's new guardian is a baddy is that he doesn't employ a single servant! And it's axiomatic in all these books that anyone who is less than impeccably groomed, looks or sounds foreign, or has bad taste in interior decoration is a villain.

Realizing there may be a gender bias at work here, I find the Hardy Boy books markedly superior to the Drews, with some of the same formulaic faults but much more humor and somewhat more complex plots. Though nowhere near reality, they come a little closer than the Drews: at least the teenage Hardys still have the burden of going to school, while Nancy is free as a bird at age sixteen.

Perhaps the most incredible element in both series is the willingness of the detecting fathers (Car-

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son Drew and Fenton Hardy) to let their offspring wade into dangerous situations with only the mildest of admonitions—lawyer Drew even gives teenage Nancy a loaded handgun for protection in one of the cases, which by present-day standards seems totally irresponsible. It's interesting from a gender-role standpoint that the Hardy Boys are permitted to receive monetary rewards for their work, getting $1000 for rounding up the counterfeiters at the end of *Old Mill,* while Nancy accepts only keepsakes (e.g., the titular old clock). Is she preserving her amateur standing for the 1932 Detection Olympics?

No amount of adult analysis can completely erase the pre-adolescent enthusiasm these books evoked. The scriveners behind the house names wrote with a strong sense of pace and atmosphere. If you loved these books growing up, you'll enjoy revisiting them.

Continuing the nostalgic mood, here are a couple of new books about great sleuths whose fans refuse to let them die with their creators, Arthur Conan Doyle and Rex Stout respectively.

*** Edward B. Hanna: *The Whitechapel Horrors,* Carroll & Graf, $21. This is far from the first effort to set Sherlock Holmes on the trail of Jack the Ripper, but it is probably the longest and surely the most elaborate, with 117 notes in 25 pages at the end of the book. (The notes were misnumbered in my advance proof, but I assume they have been corrected in the finished book.) Ostensibly based on Watson's notes supplemented by other sources, the narrative is third-person, enabling Hanna to follow Holmes's activities when Watson is not around—Watson went to Baskerville Hall alone, it turns out, because Holmes was busy in London investigating the Whitechapel murders. For all Hanna's success in evoking the period and its people, reprising the facts of the case, and capturing the personalities and relationship of Holmes and Watson, the ending is a major letdown, the sort of conclusion that would be acceptable (if still disappointing) in a nonfiction account but not in a fictionalization.

** Robert Goldsborough: *Silver Spire,* Bantam, $19.50. Having a televangelist's organization try to hire Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin to investigate some threatening messages in the collection is an intriguing idea, and Goldsborough does a reasonably interesting job with it. The plot is fairly weak, though perhaps no more so than some of Stout's own, and Goldsborough's versions of the two great characters continue to invite nitpicking. The line, "That deflated the boy's radials," sounds more like an updated version of Robert Leslie Bellem's Dan Turner than Archie Goodwin. Theological question: would an evangelical protestant televangelist use the title "Father"? (Bantam continues to reprint the *real* Wolfe books with new introductions by prominent mystery writers, most recently the 1944 two-novella collection *Not Quite Dead Enough* ⟨$4.99⟩,

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introduced by John Lutz.)

**** Walter Mosley: *White Butterfly,* Norton, $19.95. Easy Rawlins, a black unofficial private eye who operates in Los Angeles of the mid-fifties, is one of the most multi-faceted and painfully real series characters in contemporary crime fiction. With Mosley's narrative gift and way with people, he could probably get away with eschewing plot altogether in the current market, but the puzzle, concerning a serial killer of black bar girls who gets more police and press attention when a white college girl is added to the list, is both complex and surprising.

*** Henry Denker: *Doctor on Trial,* Morrow, $20. When the daughter of an influential New York tycoon dies in the City Hospital emergency room, her father is determined to ruin the young woman doctor who treated her. This is not a whodunit or even a crime novel, but it certainly qualifies as a medical detective story. Veteran novelist Denker will never be accused of elegant prose or subtle characterization, but he certainly has the good popular author's ability to grip the reader from start to finish.

*** Randy Russell: *Doll Eyes,* Doubleday/Perfect Crime, $16.50. Russell, on the other hand, *can* be accused of being a notable stylist. Try to keep a ready ear handy to listen to the best lines of dialogue and narrative, some of which are much too good to keep to yourself. The plot has its attractions, too, as sleuthing crook Rooster Franklin returns to Kansas City seeking his true love, the artist offspring of an organized crime family, and finds . . . all sorts of things.

*** Kevin Robinson: *Mall Rats,* Walker, $19.95. In his second adventure, wheelchair journalist Stick Foster's wedding is dampened by the murder of one of the guests. Helping him solve it are a contemporary variation on the Baker Street Irregulars, a group of at-loose-ends teenagers who hang around the local shopping mall. This enjoyable novel's uniqueness goes beyond putting a wheelchair sleuth in the starring role: it has the most pervasive religious theme I can recall in a book published in a secular line and not starring a clerical sleuth, and it has a strong spirit of inclusiveness that may be seen as inspirational or "politically correct" depending on your point of view. (I'll take inspirational.)

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a ***NEW*** short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

William Bankier was born and educated in Ontario, Canada, and worked in advertising for many years before moving with his family to London, England, where he took up residence on a houseboat called the Dinty Moore *and began to write full time. The author now makes his home in California, but returns to his Canadian roots frequently in his fiction, as in this latest Baytown story. . . .*

RINK RAT NO MORE

by WILLIAM BANKIER

"She hasn't done her homework!" Claudia Waterman sounded the alarm in her flinty London accent. "Talk to your daughter, Len."

Beth Waterman slung her skates over her shoulder and waited by the front door on the off-chance her father might have something to say to her.

Len was crouched over the dining-room table, gluing together a maquette of the stage design for a production of *The Pirates of Penzance*. He would be directing the operetta in April at Baytown High School. "She never listens," he said.

It was her signal to leave. Beth opened and closed the door on the stuffy house. She inhaled an exhilarating breath of frosty air and strode away down Queen Street, boots squeaking on packed snow. Stars were needle points of winking light. The night was hers and she began daring to hope that Kylie Nolan would show up at the arena.

Not that the hockey players ever took part in public skating. But sometimes one of them would wander through to see somebody in

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the office. Being from out of town, Kylie had nothing better to do than hang out at the big building, his home away from home.

She was late. As Beth hurried inside, showing her season's ticket at the door, a scratchy recording of a Viennese waltz was playing over the P.A. system. Hundreds of kids were on the rink, streaming around and around clockwise, singly or in couples. The arena smelled of frost and sweaty wool and leather. She went into the changing room, sat on a bench, and began the ritual of putting on skates.

When she stood up on blade points, she was taller, a proud sixteen-year-old with ruddy cheeks and straight chestnut hair that reached halfway down her back. Using a dark window as a mirror, Beth adjusted her crimson earmuffs, then scrubbed her mouth with the palm of a mitten to make her lips red and puffy. She smiled as she thought of the name girls like her were given by the hockey players. Rink rat! Beth took it as a compliment.

Kylie did show. It was almost ten o'clock, nearly time to stand still for the national anthem and go home. Beth had been skating continuously, sometimes by herself, occasionally with a friend. Skating in pairs, you linked arms, then clasped free hands across the front and moved ahead with a swinging motion, shoulder to shoulder. But she preferred to skate by herself. Taking several running steps to pick up speed, she rushed between people, placing one skate across the other as she leaned at a low angle on her racing turns. She was every bit as good as any of the boys. It turned some of them off, but Beth didn't care. She was a rink rat.

"There's Kylie Nolan!" somebody hissed as she was dawdling near the boards, catching a breather. Beth looked down by the entrance and there he was, standing behind the wire mesh. She skated around and performed an abrupt stop that made the sound "whuck" and threw a scud of snow.

"Hello, you," she said, wiping her runny nose with the back of her mitten.

"Hey, what gives?" Kylie Nolan was tall and broad in his dark overcoat, the pale yellow scarf neatly tucked under the square jaw. He had a broad face, green eyes widely set, black hair slicked and parted. She remembered seeing a photo in a movie magazine of an ancient actor named Tyrone Power. Kylie looked like that.

"You were neat the other night. I liked the way you cleaned that guy's clock."

"It's what they pay me to do."

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"You're good at it," she said, observing him with her head tilted like a curious cat, eyes narrowed against the light behind him.

"They want me to go to Montreal," he said. "Just told me in the office."

"The Canadiens?" Her heart stopped for a moment.

"No, the Verdun Shamrocks." The farm system of the famous NHL team included the Shamrocks and, further down the line, the Baytown Bulldogs. "They're going into the playoffs. They need a defenseman and they sent for me."

"When do you go?"

"Couple of days."

They looked past each other for a while. It was only last September that Kylie Nolan had been imported to play for Baytown. In that time, Beth had caught his eye and they had gone around together quite a bit. He was three years older than she was. Beth had tried to keep secret the hamburgers at the Paragon Cafe and that very special stroll by the golf course on an Indian summer afternoon. But her mother had found out about Kylie and was on her back.

"It's a wonderful break for you. You'll be good." Beth skated in small circles, glancing up each time she came by.

He said, "They're closing up. Want to go get something to eat?"

"Great," she breathed. "I'll get changed."

There were ten boys standing in a line on the stage of the high-school auditorium. Each was holding his right hand in a position to indicate he was carrying a policeman's baton. In the pit, Len Waterman played a few bars of introduction on the piano and the boys began creeping in stealthy procession, knees bent, heads thrust forward. As they moved, they sang: "With catlike tread, upon our prey we steal!" For comic emphasis, they performed a loud stomp at the end of each line.

Beth waited impatiently for a break in the rehearsal so she could speak to her father. It came ten minutes later when Len was finished with his policemen and was looking for his Mabel to run through "Poor Wandering One."

"Dad, I need to talk to you."

"What is it?" Waterman was joyously lost in his other world. "Yes, that's an excellent hat," he told the girl in charge of props. "Get the Major General to try it on."

"I need two hundred dollars."

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"What on earth for?" He frowned at his daughter. She looked interesting. Her eyes were glistening and her cheeks had a fine flush. "You're not pregnant?"

"Daddy! I just need the money. I'll be able to tell you later."

"I don't have it, Beth. Try me next month."

"It'll be too late then," she murmured.

But the music director was slapping the palms of his hands on the stage apron, vaulting up there like a pretty fair gymnast. He went running after his policemen. "Boys, I want you back!"

Beth had already decided what to do if her father turned her down. It would not be easy. But it was not as if she had a choice. Kylie Nolan was the best thing in her life and she was not going to let him skate away. She left the school by the main door and hurried down the hill past the public library and on to Front Street. Her intention was to drink coffee at Latimer's, killing time until her mother went home from the *Baytown Banner* office. If she got up the nerve, she might try persuading her over the telephone.

From her perch on the corner of Orville Lake's desk, Claudia Waterman could keep an eye on her cubicle down the hallway near the editorial rooms. If anybody went in there seeking petty cash or whatever, she could set aside her vodka and tonic (discreetly held in a ceramic mug) and dart out of the editor's office to take care of business.

"You haven't given me your answer," Lake pursued her.

"Perhaps I don't like the terms in which you couched your question," Claudia said, and they both laughed. Her eyes widened as if the innuendo had surprised her. Claudia Simpson Waterman had delicious eyes. Somebody back in London, years before good old Len, had used that word to describe her eyes.

"It's a simple business trip. Two days in Toronto to discuss advertising contracts with the agencies. I'll need assistance." Orville Lake was prematurely bald on top, his domed head fringed with grey hair. But with his weight and height, he looked powerful as a professional wrestler. "And nobody mentioned couches. We'd be sleeping in a bed."

The telephone rang. Lake answered. "She's right here." He handed the instrument to Claudia. "Your daughter."

"Beth, what's up?" She listened for some time, staring at her boss. Then she said, "I can't spare two hundred dollars. And what makes you think I'd help you do anything that crazy?" More staring. "For-

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get it. Last time I looked, Kylie Nolan was a grown-up man and you're still a baby." She took the receiver away from her ear and stared at it. She set it down on its cradle. "Kylie Nolan is getting a chance to play in Montreal. Beth wants to go there and watch him play." Claudia shrugged. "She'll miss him if he makes it."

"Her mother will miss him more."

"Shut up." But she would not look at Lake.

"I watched you when he came in here to be interviewed. You could hardly keep your eyes off him. Or your cradle-robbing hands."

Her cheeks burning, Claudia slid off the desk and set down her empty mug. "He's good-looking," she said. Then, as she strode out of the office and headed back to close up her desk, she added, "And he's young."

Beth stood in the alleyway beside the Coronet Hotel where she could observe the *Baytown Banner* doorway. It was dark there, and chilly with the river twenty yards away at her back. She shifted from foot to foot, switching her gaze now and then across Front Street into the market square. She could see the high roof of the arena, and facing it, the low silhouette of the police station. She was about to commit a crime. But what choice did she have? Kylie would need her with him in Montreal whether he knew it or not.

A door swung open and light spilled onto the street. Beth watched her mother head towards the Four Corners, hugging her purse to her chest. She waited. A few minutes later, Orville Lake came out and swaggered in her direction. She eased back out of sight, heard the rumble of voices as he opened the door to the Men's Beverage Room and went inside. Now the coast was clear. From numerous visits, Beth knew exactly where to go.

It was warm inside the newspaper office. Nobody was visible behind the glass partitions in the commercial office on the ground floor. Avoiding the main stairway, Beth opened a narrow door and ascended the side steps to the second floor. She had a clear path past the editorial bullpen where a couple of individuals were bent over desks. The door to her mother's cubicle was ajar. Beth slipped inside and went directly to the drawer where the cashbox was kept.

The drawer was locked. Beth had brought a heavy screwdriver from home, concealed in the zippered inner pocket of her parka coat. If Claudia had said yes on the telephone, none of this would be happening; she would have put the implement back on her father's workbench, unused.

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The drawer snapped open easily, old wood splitting around the metal tongue. Then, the grey steel box itself was locked. Beth was able to use the screwdriver again, forcing in the sharp tip, twisting and lifting. After a few tries, the lid popped open. There was $208 inside. She took it all. There would be no fingerprints, she had her wooly gloves on. Not that it mattered. When the robbery was discovered, Claudia would have no doubt who was behind it.

Len Waterman poured two glasses of dry sherry and handed one to Claudia. It was a custom carried over from their time together in England. "Guess what. Beth asked me for two hundred dollars today. Didn't say what for."

"She asked me, too. That hockey player, Nolan. He's been called to Montreal. She wants to go there and watch him play."

"He must be pretty good."

"Is that your only reaction?" His wife's sharp tone silenced Len. "All I need is my daughter turning into a camp follower."

"She's got a good head on her shoulders. Are you worried something will happen to her?"

"I'm worried about you crossing streets. Wake up, Len. Have you taken a good look at Nolan? He's an animal."

When Beth arrived home her mother called from the kitchen, "Where were you?"

"Talking to people."

"You're late. Get washed for supper. And then your father and I want to have a word with you."

Beth was prepared to say she had already eaten, but her mother was making potato pancakes and they smelled good.

Beth was carrying her duffel bag when she left for school in the morning. It was what she did when she had gym. But today the bag contained garments other than her gym outfit. The stolen money was tucked away in an envelope inside her coat.

She took different streets on her way downtown, avoiding the high school. When she reached the bus station, she went inside, bought a ticket to Montreal, then hurried away to loiter near a coffee shop. The sun was warm in a clear blue sky; icicles were forming on the eaves of houses. When the bus arrived she ran to get aboard. Baytown was not a rest stop. Almost immediately, they were on their way east along Dundas Street, past the hospital, the town soon left behind.

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The bus driver was friendly. Against regulations, he struck up a conversation with the engaging girl who occupied the front seat on his right, her knees braced against the chrome railing of the entrance well. He knew a little bit about hockey but he had never heard of Kylie Nolan. The Shamrocks, he said, might be practicing this afternoon at the Forum. He knew of a rooming house on nearby Chomedy Street and wrote down the address and the landlady's name on the back of a luggage tag.

They rolled into Montreal at four in the afternoon, arriving by way of Cote de Liesse and the Decarie traffic circle. He let Beth out on the corner at Atwater and Sherbrooke, a short walk from the Forum.

She hurried down to Ste. Catherine Street and wandered past the famous building. The marquee advertised Canadiens hockey, wrestling, a Russian circus, and the Shamrocks vs. Oshawa in an early round of the playoffs.

Chomedy was the next street over. The rooming house was a tall old burgundy brick building between newer condominiums. The landlady remembered the bus driver. She gave Beth a practiced glance before signing her in and accepting thirty dollars for the first night's rent. Beth stowed her duffel bag in the room. It had linoleum on the floor and glistening ivory enamel on the woodwork. A sepia Jesus occupied a pine frame above a bed with a pink chenille cover.

Not many staff were on duty at the Forum. She had no trouble charming her way past the young man at the door. The rink took her breath away. Dazzling painted signs at ice level; the high, girdered roof; thousands of seats in sections colored red, blue, grey. There were players skating, passing. The puck struck the boards with a noise like cannon fire.

Beth spotted Kylie. He must have been working hard. His face shone with sweat, his hair was plastered down. He was cruising now, hands wide apart holding his stick horizontally across his hips making circuits of the ice surface with slow, powerful strides. Beth thought of a shark, after feeding.

She made her way up to rinkside past the Plexiglas shielding and waited for him to see her. He did at last, and his eyes widened. Then he grinned and shook his head and skated to her while looking in another direction. "You can't be serious," he said.

"I am so."

"How did you get here?"

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"The bus. I did something crazy. I'll tell you later. You need me, I'm your biggest fan."

Kylie went to shower and change. Beth sat in her front-row seat soaking up the atmosphere, marveling at her courage in coming here. But she was not afraid.

Twenty minutes later, she and her hockey player were on their way out of the building, heading for Beth's rooming house.

Claudia discovered the broken desk drawer and the looted cashbox when she came in to work at nine-thirty. She had no difficulty identifying the perpetrator. To confirm her suspicion, she telephoned Len at the school. "Is Beth in class today?"

"Stay on the line. I'll check." Len was back a minute later to say, "She didn't show."

Claudia explained about the stolen money. "I know what happened. She's gone to Montreal to be with that hockey player."

"How can you be sure?"

"We wouldn't give her traveling money so she took it. I'm going after her."

"Nolan may make trouble."

"I can handle him. I'm going home now to change and then I'm taking the car. I'll call you from Montreal."

Claudia went into Orville Lake's office. She told him her daughter had stolen the petty cash and explained her belief that Beth had gone to Montreal, following Kylie Nolan. "Don't worry, I'll replace the money. I'm on my way to bring her back right now."

"You must be joking."

"I'll find them. She's a juvenile. I'll bring in the police if I have to."

"Claudia, this is old Orville. You don't care about the money. And you don't care if your daughter leaves Baytown and joins the Mounties. You're going down there to put yourself between her and Nolan. He's not available to you. But you sure don't want her having him."

Claudia knew the truth when she heard it. "Anyway, I'm going."

"You don't need this."

"I should be back tomorrow. Maybe a couple of days."

"I haven't said you can go."

"I owe the box two hundred and eight dollars," she said as she strode from the office. Lake was left standing behind his desk. He

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hated the impatient whine of his voice, and the way his heart was pounding.

Claudia stopped only once for gas on her high-speed journey to Montreal. Accustomed still to the lush green landscape of her native England, she was awestruck by the terrain of naked glacial rock through which she drove. Her mind drifted back to Palmer Grammar School in South London where Len Waterman had entered her life.

He was in charge of a choir of Canadian schoolboys in England for a Commonwealth competition. Claudia was a school secretary, a liaison in charge of setting up accommodations for the visiting choirs. She found a place for Len himself in her apartment overlooking Putney Bridge. They made a nice couple during the ten days the boys were in town. Len was a capable choir leader; his group took an Honorable Mention.

Ten weeks after the visitors flew home, Claudia Simpson telephoned Len Waterman to say she was pregnant and what should she do? "That's easy," Len told her. She had never forgotten the warmth in his voice as he said, "You come over here and you marry me just as quickly as you can."

Now, sixteen years later, she was speeding eastward across the winter landscape like a witch on a broom, pursuing the child whose conception had brought her to this country. Claudia cleared her mind and tried listening to her feelings. Yes, there it was. She was not really chasing Beth. She was filled with anticipation at the prospect of a confrontation with Kylie Nolan. What would he say? What might he do?

Claudia had visited Montreal more than once; she knew where the Forum was and she had reasoned that, sooner or later, the hockey players would be there. The winter afternoon closed in early. She was glad to leave the dark countryside behind and race for safety into the lighted streets of the metropolis.

Arriving at the Forum, she began looking for a parking space. There was nothing on the main streets but there were structures where she could drive up a ramp. On her second circuit around the block, she saw Beth leave the Forum by a side door, then latch onto Kylie's arm as he emerged after her. Claudia slowed to a crawl. They were jaywalking across the street. She followed them until they trudged up the steps of an old building between new ones. After watching them inside, Claudia headed for the nearest parking

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structure, left her car, and came walking slowly back to Chomedy Street.

"Of course I'm glad you're here," Kylie said, lifting Beth in his arms like the child she had so recently been. He kissed her between the eyes. "But you really can't just leave home."

"I know. Jailbait." She made a face.

"That's one thing." He looked around. "How are you paying for this place?"

"My mother gave me money."

"No she didn't."

She decided he might be impressed. "I stole it. Last night I went into my mother's office at the *Banner*. She's in charge of petty cash. I cracked the tin box and took two hundred bucks."

Nolan sat down in a fat round chair with three white doilies on it. "You're trouble, you know that? Never mind, we'll go back tomorrow and I'll give them the money."

"You're not going back. You've got the rest of the series against Oshawa."

The hockey player made a steeple of his fingers and peered past them at the girl with the elfin face. "I don't think I'm going to play much longer."

"Are you hurt?"

"I don't have the desire. Baytown is one thing. I can hack it at that level. Up here, it's a stride faster. I knew it would be."

"Give it a chance."

"What for? In the game last night, there were guys I checked real hard. They bounced right back. Beth, it's never finished." Kylie examined bruises on the knuckles of both hands. "I fought a guy. The officials let us go at it. I couldn't beat him. It was a draw. You should have seen the way he skated to the penalty box. He stared at me like he couldn't wait to start again."

"That's hockey."

"It got me out of Nova Scotia. I'd still be clearing tables in the old man's diner. But I don't have the edge. The guys who go on up to the NHL are willing to pay the price."

Beth tried to think of something to say. This was not the Kylie Nolan she had dreamed about. There was something different about him. It was not cowardice, she could tell he was not chicken. He seemed older, and softer. The feeling she was experiencing was not unpleasant.

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The floor creaked in the hallway outside the door. Somebody knocked. "Who is it?" The knock was repeated.

Beth went and opened the door a crack. When she saw her mother, she said, "I don't believe this."

Claudia walked in unopposed. She glanced first at the bedcover, which was undisturbed. She said to Kylie, "Do I call the police? Is that what everybody wants?"

"Mother, you look ridiculous."

"I'm going to pay back the money," Kylie said.

"That's the easy part. What's the matter with you? This girl is sixteen."

"Seventeen in April."

"You lure her down here when she should be in school." Claudia sat on the edge of the bed. Sheer nylon made a sound as she crossed her legs. She smoothed the hem of the red silk dress she had put on that morning when she hurried home to change for Montreal. "Can't you find anybody closer to your own age?"

"I'm giving it up," the hockey player said. "I can't make it in the NHL."

"You won't make it anywhere." It was the wrong thing to say but Claudia could not help herself. "I know losers. I could write a book."

Beth went for her mother. Kylie moved fast to put himself between them. As he forced the angry girl out of the room, she was yelling, "Who asked you? Who the hell asked you?"

Downstairs on the street, Beth complained, "Why isn't she outside? That's my room."

"Let's cool out. We'll get coffee across the street. We'll go back and she'll be gone."

They killed an hour at a lunch counter around the corner. When they left, it felt even colder outside. Beth wrapped her arms around herself and began to trot. A grey sedan with white sidewalls raced out of a parking lot and came within inches of knocking the girl into next week. Before either of them could make a move, it had gunned down Ste. Catherine Street, swung right onto Atwater, and was gone.

"I'm warm now," Beth said as they made for the rooming house. The door of the room was ajar. "Way to go, Mother," Beth said, moving inside. Claudia Simpson Waterman was still there. She was stretched out on the floor beside the bed. There was blood from a deep gash on the side of her head. She was not breathing.

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"Don't touch anything," Kylie said. He was looking at a heavy crystal ashtray on the floor beside the body. "We'd better call the police."

One of the cops recognized Kylie Nolan on sight. The Montreal sports pages had run his picture over a story suggesting that he might one day be the new Butch Bouchard. When the detectives arrived and looked at the frightened kids and examined the dead body on the floor, they saw no reason to detain the pair once they had delivered a statement.

The stolen petty cash remained Beth's secret. She was crying too hard to talk about it anyway. "This is my fault," was all she could say. The young girl reasoned that if she had not fled Baytown, her mother would not have come in pursuit. Her parents would be home together now, drinking their stupid sherry and talking about supper. What would her father do without Claudia? How would he get along?

The police saw it as a random crime of violence. The older woman had stayed in the room to rest while the young people went for coffee. Possibly a street person had seen her come in. The killing could have happened during a bungled robbery.

Beth was given permission to return home. Somebody from Montreal would be coming to Baytown to interview her father. "Just routine," they said. But that raised a new question in Beth's mind. Could Len have come here and done such a thing? Her parents did fight a fair part of the time. Sometimes her mother said terrible things and her father kept his feelings bottled up.

The police assumed Kylie would be staying in Montreal to play out his contract with the Shamrocks. He did not stay. A telephone call from Kylie to the coach confirmed what team officials had begun to suspect. Nolan's heart was not in the game. It was possible he did not have the skills or the guts to make it in that league. But since the organization had an investment in him, the coach advised him to go away and think about it. He would have the whole off-season to make up his mind.

The couple came back to Baytown by train. "You look terrible," he said. Beth's head was jolting from side to side with the motion of the carriage. Her energy was drained.

"I don't know what to do. I'll have to quit school. I'll have to take care of my father."

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Kylie dropped Beth off at her place and drove on in the taxi to his apartment on the West Hill. Beth went inside and hugged her grieving father, then held him for a long time because he seemed in no hurry to move away. They sat at the kitchen table, not eating or drinking, just being together in the familiar room. The house seemed very quiet. "She told me about the money," Len said after a while.

"I had to take it. I wish I'd never thought of going."

"Don't worry about it. I'll pay them back."

"Kylie already said he will." Beth touched her father's hand. "Will you let us do these things? I know I'm not even seventeen."

He looked devastated. Until today, she had never thought of her father as being old. Beth asked him about the production of *Pirates* at the school, but his face would not relax. Then she said, "Know what Kylie told me? He said I can't be a rink rat all my life. Did you know your daughter used to be a rink rat?"

"I knew that."

"Anyway, he's giving up hockey. So I won't have any reason to hang around the rink."

"What will he do?"

"We discussed it. He thought he might do something at the high school. Like assistant gym teacher. Could you put in a word?"

"The boys would like him," Len said, producing his first smile that day. "So would the girls, for that matter."

"You know how to hurt a person," Beth said, getting up and walking around the table to sit on her father's lap.

Beth and Kylie went to see Orville Lake in his office at the *Banner*. The big man sat back in his shirtsleeves with his hands clasped behind his head. When Kylie took out his wallet, Lake said, "What's this?"

"I'm giving you back the two hundred dollars Beth took from your petty cash."

"No, don't do that."

"We have to." Kylie began counting out twenty-dollar bills.

The editor leaned forward and snatched up the bills. He pushed them back into Kylie's hand. "Keep your money. This whole thing is over." Lake seemed to realize he was talking too loud. He swung around, got out of his chair, and went to stand by a window that looked out on the town hall with its clock tower. "I've lost a real good secretary. And a friend. Let's just leave it alone."

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The young people were embarrassed by Lake's display of emotion. After a brief silence, Beth cleared her throat. "I'll be seventeen in April," she said. "I'm not going to attend school after this year. I know I could do a job for the newspaper."

"See Personnel. Fill out an application." Then, noticing her disappointment, Lake added, "I'll follow through. I'm sure we can find you something."

Beth flashed a triumphant glance at Kylie.

The kids were still sitting there, so Lake looked for something else to say. "I'm sorry about your mother. I told her not to go to Montreal."

Downstairs, they took a wrong turn, followed a long corridor, pushed open a door, and found themselves in a parking lot with the building on one side and the river on the other. Kylie said, "What was all that about?"

"I don't know. I've never seen him show his feelings. When I met him other times, he was sort of distant." Beth felt reassured. Her mother must have been an important person at the *Banner*.

It was necessary to squeeze between cars to reach the alley leading to Front Street. Beside them was a grey sedan with white sidewalls. Kylie stopped. "Take a look."

Beth looked at the car. She would never forget jumping for her life on the street in Montreal. "Is it the same one?"

"I have a feeling." He noticed something else. A small piece of yellow cardboard was folded and jammed firmly into the crack between a fender and the hood. Kylie took it out and unfolded it. He showed it to Beth. It said, "Forum Parking" and there was a date and time.

They walked across the market square to the police station. Chief Greb greeted them in his office. He studied the ticket while they told him their story. "Leave this with me," he said. "I'll speak to Mr. Lake and I'll let you know what happens." As they were on their way out, he added, "I'm sorry about your mother, Beth."

Lake's arrest was announced over CBAY that evening. On the following morning, a Saturday, Beth and Kylie were in a booth at the Paragon Cafe. Chief Greb came in, saw them, walked over, and slid in beside Beth. "That was a nice piece of detective work, you two," he said.

"We heard he confessed."

"Couldn't wait to do it. He was kind of obsessed with your mother. A man can develop crazy thoughts. He figured she was going to run

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away with you, Kylie, and never come back. He drove to Montreal the same day she did and hung around outside the Forum. He saw you guys and he watched Claudia go after you inside the rooming house. When the two of you came out, he went in and confronted her." The chief ordered coffee and pie. "We'll never know exactly what was said. There was an argument, a struggle, he hit her with the ashtray. My guess is he'll be convicted of second-degree manslaughter."

All three left the restaurant together. Outside on Front Street, Greb said, "What's this I hear about you giving up hockey?"

"I don't feel like spending the next ten years punching guys on skates."

"He may be going to get a job as assistant gym teacher at the high school."

"That's admirable," the policeman said. "But this town could use another clever head on the force." Greb spoke over his shoulder as he walked away. "Try thinking of yourself as a cop. Then drop by one day and tell me what you decide."

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Author of several mystery novels featuring P. I. Harry Garnish and Chicago nun Sister Bridget O'Toole, Frank McConnell is also a well-known professor of English literature who has served several times on the Pulitzer Prize fiction jury. His most recent novel, Liar's Poker, *will be published by Walker & Company in June . . .*

THEY WON'T GET HODGE

by FRANK McCONNELL

After I made sure she was dead, my hands started to shake and my mouth dried up. I wanted a drink of water more than anything in the world. I think I was more worried about finding a water fountain than I was about getting out of there undetected. The hall would be patroled by a janitor, but not very regularly. University security guards, after all, aren't exactly Dobermans. And the fluorescents were all turned on, as they always were at night, and the windows were all open, letting in that warm night air, scented with something ferny, that you only get in California. Everything was reassuring, safe.

No, I wasn't worried about getting out. But I was so *thirsty*. And there was the blood to wash off, too.

It was my first, you understand. They'd told me it would be the hardest, the most unpredictable. They'd warned me not to expect too much of it. And Jack Twelve, my sponsor, had even told me to take along a thermos of something in case I got dry mouth.

Jack Twelve had been right, of course. But you never listen to good advice, do you?

I lurched—no, that's the word—I lurched down the hall and couldn't remember where the water fountain was. I should have been able to, but I couldn't for the life of me (haha haha, I thought: for the life of me). I could remember where the men's room was, though, and held my hands carefully in the toilet. Jack Twelve had told me about that: after you flush, there's no blood left on the

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porcelain, unlike a sink. And then I turned on the sink tap and, not caring whether I got my tie and jacket wet, put my mouth to the faucet and drank.

There was, as I had expected, no problem getting out of the building. On the way to the parking lot I passed a guard I knew. "Hi, Professor Cooper," he said. "Working late?"

"Hi, Dave," I said. "Yeah, publisher deadlines are a pain." He laughed. I laughed.

I couldn't believe how *cool* I was. But the building where I'd done it was a healthy mile from the lot behind my office. So I had nothing to worry about, did I? I even enjoyed running into Dave. He didn't know, he would never know—I knew he wouldn't—and I was beginning to feel that exhilaration, that rush they'd told me about. My hands weren't shaking anymore, and my mouth wasn't dry. The night breeze off the ocean felt wonderful.

I drove to the apartment, fed my cat, Mr. Chow, poured myself a double brandy, and put the Fauré Requiem on the stereo. Yes, I noticed the irony: not for nothing am I a professor of comparative literature. Then I dialed the unlisted number I'd been given a few weeks before.

"This is Jack Twelve," said the recording after four rings. "After the beep, leave your message and number, and I'll get back to you as soon as I can."

Postbeep, I gave my number and as calmly as I could, said, "This is your baby." Sponsors always refer to sponsorees as their "babies." It was faintly demeaning but, they all said, just another way of maintaining order in the Society.

"This is your baby," I said, "but a baby no longer. Fourth floor, Quentin Hall, in the Xerox room."

He had to have confirmation, of course. Otherwise, one might claim anything. I sat back, listened to Fauré—was there ever such misty music?—and sipped brandy.

Her name had been Marcie. Marcie Something, one of forty or so, variously eager and bored, but universally talcumed young people listening, Monday and Wednesday, to me explaining the complexities of *Oedipus Rex, King Lear,* and *Faust.* As if I understood the complexities myself. But she, she had also been one of those students—every teacher knows them—who hang around after the lecture, wide-eyed and with stupid questions, wondering if they can come to the office for a private conference.

In other words, horny.

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So it had been relatively easy to arrange for a few friendly beers in the campus pub, then for a stroll around the grounds, then for a visit to the Xerox room in Quentin Hall. She had been breathless and excited: thought she knew what was coming, she did.

Of course, I'd been seen with her. But they tell you about that in the Society, too: the best way to bring suspicion on yourself is to act as if you don't want to bring suspicion on yourself. You were seen last with the deceased? Very well, then (without the slightest raising of the eyebrows): you were. What of it? It's not defiance, it's evasion.

Selection of the victim, Execution of the deed, and Evasion of the consequences. S.E.E. The first and most important lesson when you're apprenticed. They never stop drumming it into you.

As I closed the door of the Xerox room, I could hear her breathing. I was breathing hard, too. I believe they're called pheromones, those little particles or whatever that carry a sexual charge. She was generating them, and so was I. Her bare arm brushed against my hand—as if by accident.

"The campus is beautiful at night, isn't it, Professor?" she asked, looking up at me and smiling, her lips moist.

"This isn't a classroom, Marcie," I said. "Call me William—or Bill, if you like." The pheromones were so thick in the air by now that you could almost see them scintillate. We were both feeling that acrid-sweet tremor of fear and expectation that makes all good seductions good: it was the last delicious stage before the deed.

"Yes, it is beautiful. Beautiful," I went on. "Would you like to come over to the window and look for a while?"

She didn't answer, but put her arm around my waist, and tilted her head back, eyes closed, for a kiss.

"Don't worry," they'd told me. "You'll know the right time."

Now?

Now.

It was a Sheetrock knife, and I cut, holding her mouth to mine, just below her right ear around the back of her neck.

The rest all became rather vague and luminous, even after a short time. I began to doze in my chair until the Fauré switched off and the sudden silence woke me. I poured some more brandy and wondered what to play next. Of course! *Symphonie Fantastique*. No! Mahler's First, the extraordinary Third Movement. "Frere Jacques" at funeral-march tempo. Oh, Marcie, I thought. You'll have a memorial service—albeit private—more tasteful than anything your I'm

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sure ordinary parents will arrange for in their I'm sure ordinary chapel.

Two sips of brandy and ten solemn measures into Mahler, the phone rang.

"Miss Nichols?" said the voice at the other end. My heart leapt.

"Sorry," I said hoarsely. "This is the Kelly residence."

It was Jack Twelve and he was using the identification code reserved for full-fledged members of the Society. The first and last victims of the Founder: Mary Anne Nichols and Mary Kelly. It also meant first and last altogether, beginning and end, the unbroken circle of the Founder's work. Before Jack spoke again, I knew the kill had been confirmed. And so had I.

"You're now Jack Thirteen," he said. "Congratulations, brother."

"Thank you, brother," I said. "It was everything you told me it would be. In fact, I even—"

"Now, now," he said, chuckling indulgently, "I know the first time out is always special. It was for me, too. But you've got to relax now. Don't let the thrill dissipate by talking it out."

"Sorry," I said, chastened. I hadn't meant to act like a fool.

"It's okay," he said, and I could almost see his warm smile at the other end of the connection. "Just try and get some sleep, won't you? You'll be notified of the next meeting in the usual way." And he hung up.

Mr. Chow was looking up at me expectantly, so I patted my lap. He jumped up, made a nest, and started purring. Stroking him and sipping brandy, sipping brandy and stroking him, I felt the delicious reverie coming back again. Till the phone rang.

"Hello?" I gasped, while Mr. Chow jumped away from the lap-quake and brandy sloshed onto the carpet. Not the police already?

"Hi," said Nancy. "You sound awful. Did I wake you up?"

"No, just saved me from falling asleep."

"Oh, I'm sorry, honey. Look, I won't keep you long. But I lucked into two freebies to the mime performance tomorrow night. Wanna go? Maybe some dinner before or after? It's been almost a week since I've seen you outside the office, Bill."

Nancy was my fiancée and a lecturer in history: pert, eager, and still convinced that happiness and normality were, in some secret sacred language, both spelled the same. A rationalist, God help us all, just like the eighteenth-century, mainly French philosophers who were her special joy. She bobbed her hair and took refuge behind large horn-rims that made her own grey eyes look larger, even if

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they made the world outside look a little bit distorted. As I said, a rationalist.

How had we become engaged? Coffee cups after class, joking conversations about students, pizza and beer on Friday nights, and then the inevitable, predictable clinch in the apartment—hers or mine, I can't remember—and next morning, or eventually, the decision that this time it was for real. We shared the bored joyousness of the both-already-once-married.

Entropy, I believe they call it. Why do you think I joined the Society?

"Mimes?" I said, stifling a yawn. "Sure. Sounds good. Want me to meet you, or pick you up?"

She wanted me to pick her up, and I was tired and impatient enough to agree. "Love you, dear," she said.

"Right. Me too. See you at seven." I finished the brandy, canceled poor Mahler in the middle of his Fourth Movement, and crashed, fully clothed, into bed. It had been a glorious day.

Southern California is not merely paradisaical, it is intrusively so. One knows, of course, what Chandler, West, and so many others have written about corruption in Eden. But that's all wrong. It isn't corruption that makes the place so strange; it's perfection.

I was thinking this as I drove in to the University the next morning. It was a brilliant day, the sky was clear of everything except hawks and hang gliders, I had had oranges, figs, and a Bloody Mary for breakfast, I was still full of the thrill of the night before. And I was frightened.

Frightened because of perfection. Until it tumbles into the sea, this is the most perfect environment that a hypothetical God could have thought of for his hypothetical creatures. So what could possibly be wrong? Or, rather: in a garden this good, what could possibly be cruel? And then, what could possibly be living? Where is the serpent—who, after all, makes life interesting?

I turned off 101—the Camino Real, the King's Highway laid down by the Franciscans and paved by the moneymen—onto the campus. The sun was dazzling.

In 1888, in Whitechapel, in one of the worst slums of London, the sun had not dazzled. It had, if anything, brooded. And within ten miles of the Whitechapel district, Robert Louis Stevenson was putting the final touches to *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. And, a year before, A. Conan Doyle had published "A Study in Scarlet," wherein Holmes

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began his career dealing with an apparently inexplicable, random killing in the heart of the City. Of course, the story had ended with a humdrum, rational explanation of the killing. But then our founder had begun the Work. It was all so clear, if you only looked at it clearly.

As I walked into the office, smiling at the secretaries, I took a glance at the morning paper. There it was on page one.

Comstock: so that had been her last name.

"Isn't it terrible, Professor Cooper?" said Sally, who ordered my books for me every quarter. I didn't know Sally's last name, either.

"Yes," I said. "Terrible. Terrible." And poured myself a cup of coffee and strolled toward my office. I had two hours before class—and I wanted to be alone and bask for a little while longer.

Nobody knows when the Sons of Jack was founded, or by whom. Of course, we refer to "The Founder," but that's by way of homage. After all, Jack One was never discovered and even, according to some recent (heretical) speculations, may have been more than one person, and the killings not random at all. These concerns are best left to wretched scrabblers in the dust mounds of history. What matters is the myth of the Founder, not the tawdry reality. As with all great moral forces, he lives in the image of himself he created, not in newspaper obituaries or railway timetables.

As with AA, we are a nonprofit organization and the only condition for membership is a desire to join. Of course, we have to be more—circumspect—about our recruitment than AA, or the American Legion, or even the American Communist Party. Not everyone is cut out for the Work.

I remembered that I had a date with Nancy that night, and called my favorite restaurant, the Mousse Odile, for reservations for two at ten-thirty.

No. They have to be very, very careful about who is recruited for the Society. Sometimes, as my sponsor Jack Twelve told me, they spend years examining a person, looking for signs that you're right for the Sons. And even then, the first few conversations are oh, so delicate. But then there comes the moment when the sponsor leans toward you and says, "Would you like to kill, Bill? And get away with it?"

If you're right for the Sons, your chest falls sweetly in on itself, like a high-school junior at her first big prom. And "Yes," you say. "Oh, yes."

"Okay, then. Now here's a number for you to call. . . ."

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It was time for class. I dragged off to my classroom and my thirty bored students—no, twenty-nine today, I remembered. I told them that I had meant to speak about Goethe's *Elective Affinities* as an essay on the Romantic ideal of the unpredictability of passion: random loving, as it were.

"But," I said, sighing and leaning heavily forward over my lectern, "a valued member of our class, Miss Marcie Comstock, has as you know been brutally, tragically murdered. I really can't bring myself to conduct business as usual on a day like this, so with your permission I'm going to call off class for today. I think it would be best for all of us to spend this time in memory of what Marcie meant to us. I know that's what I'm going to do. Class dismissed."

The sheep bought it. Some of the girls' eyes were moist, and some of the boys looked at me with new, hey-you-know-he's-really-all-right respect. I didn't allow myself a smile until I got back to my office and locked the door.

Do you know how many unsolved murders there are every year in the U.S.? If you don't, I'm not going to tell you, because you should know. I know. We don't take credit for all of them. We don't take credit for anything. But, as the Founder said in one of his letters to Scotland Yard, we're here, and we're waiting.

The mime show was predictably boring—*why* do the semi-talented believe that not speaking on stage somehow absolves them of their own mediocrity?—the restaurant was predictably excellent—gigot for her, braised sweetbreads for me—and Nancy was predictably mechanical and lumbering at home. After a last glass of chablis, I rolled over and thought about Marcie. I couldn't wait to be given my next Opportunity. (The Sons of Jack always call it an Opportunity. They pick the time, you pick the victim.)

The next few weeks were a kind of dream. How often have you heard that? But it's true. Oh, to be sure, the police interviewed me about Marcie, and to be sure I had been seen last with the deceased. But my reputation was impeccable, my IRS forms unassailable, and my professional standing at least high enough that the cops, after a little preliminary sniffing, broke off.

The Society had been right!

I went to one, two, three meetings of the Society. We were always summoned by a phone-chain system: I had two numbers to call once my sponsor called me. Some of them I knew, some I didn't. Some arrived in three-piece suits, some in plaid lumberjack shirts. We'd

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meet in private homes, high-school gyms, once even in the basement of a church. Punch and cookies; never any alcohol or drugs. Conversation about the Founder and the Work we carried on.

The marvelous thing about random killing is its purity. *L'acte gratuite,* the French call it. You kill neither because you hate nor because you love, but because you have *chosen*. What a relief to let all your enmity, frustration, boredom flow out upon someone you don't even care about and couldn't possibly care about since she has already been selected as one of the dead.

And then I kept seeing Nancy, too. She was anxious for our wedding day, and she wanted more and more to move in and organize my apartment. I was even beginning to find her attractive, as well as convenient.

"Bill," she would say in bed, taking off her glasses and twinkling her eyes (yes, she wore her glasses to bed). "Bill, you know you don't have to be Clint Eastwood."

"Right," I would mumble. "Meaning what?"

"Meaning," she'd say, rubbing my neck just where I liked it to be rubbed, "you don't have to perform. You just have to be there."

And I'd be Clint Eastwood.

Thinking about Marcie.

And then the phone rang, late one sunny afternoon, and Mr. Chow jumped off my lap and I picked up the receiver and it was Jack Twelve.

"We have to talk," he said. "My place, as soon as you can get over here."

"Right," I said, realizing that I'd have to cancel a late-afternoon seminar. But you never argue with a sponsor.

He was—is—a distinguished professor of economics. Widowed and childless, five times a White House adviser, once on the cover of *Newsweek*. To me, he was Jack Twelve, sitting on the Danish Modern chair in his living room and wielding an Old Fashioned like a scepter.

I had been there a few times before, not many, but this was the first time I noticed how—strange—his house was. I mean, there were no photos on the walls or on the piano. The throw carpets on the parquet floor all looked brand new, and didn't have that aura of being used that things in a house acquire after you've lived there for a while. The furniture was all spare and immaculate: but don't you expect the odd stain on the sofa, the odd burn mark on the floor, to become part of your house?

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"Jack," he said as I helped myself to a brandy and soda and sat across from him. "Good to see you. Thanks for coming."

"No problem," I said. "What's this about?"

Jack Twelve sighed, sniffed a long brown cigarette, and lit it. "You're almost a full member of the Society now . . ." he began.

"Almost!" I said. "What do you mean, almost? You told me—"

"I know what I told you," he waved his hand. "I know what I told you. But—I'm sure you'll understand this—I couldn't tell you everything. You see, the Society is . . . well, the Society has to be extraordinarily cautious about full membership. Now"—waving his cigarette to stop my interruption—"now, you did a fine, clean job on your first Opportunity, and believe me, everyone in the Society was very pleased with you."

"So what's wrong?" I blurted. "I've gone to all the meetings. I've been a good member. What did I do wrong?"

He smiled that kindly smile of his. The one he had used on so many television interviews about the balance of trade.

"Jack, Jack," he said. "You haven't done anything wrong. But to make sure that you're one of us, we have to see that you're committed to the central ideas of the Society. We have to feel confident that you understand what the Work is *really* about, what it's—what it's—*for.*"

"Well," I said angrily. "What does that mean?"

"It means," he sighed, "that you have one more task to perform before you are granted membership in the Society. Somebody you know." He looked at me.

I looked back.

"Anybody in particular?" I asked.

He chuckled. "Oh no. Nothing like that. We're not *hit men,* you know. Only, to qualify for full membership, you must demonstrate your full freedom. Pick anyone you wish. But you must know them, and know them well. Parent, child, neighbor: do you understand?"

"I understand," I said. "I understand that you're trying to jerk me around. You know what you told me about the Society when you enlisted me. No guilt, you said. Only chance-chosen victims, you said. Only . . ."

"Now, Jack," he said.

"Don't call me that!" I shouted. "You know my real name, and you can use it from now on. I resign from the Society. Hell, what does 'resign' even mean? You don't have any hope of making me do this. Can't I do the Work on my own?"

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Jack Twelve smiled. "Jack, Jack," he said. "Hope doesn't enter into it. If you had any hope, you wouldn't have joined the Society in the first place. And let's not kid ourselves that the Work could go on without the Society. Oh, of course, you could—well, do the deed without sanction and without the meetings. But it wouldn't be the same, would it?"

I started to speak, but he raised a hand to silence me. "No, you needn't ask what you were going to ask. Of course, if you leave the Society, there will be no attempt to implicate you in anything. You see, we have the perfect insured mutual trust. Neither you nor we can raise a hue and cry without implicating one another."

I had to listen. Couldn't help myself.

"But you need us," he went on. "Otherwise you'd be just another lunatic with a—what did you use?"

"Sheetrock knife," I mumbled.

"Oh yes, to be sure. But with us, you see, you are not a chance madman. You are Jack Thirteen. And you know you need that." He leaned toward me, whispering. "You know you do."

I saw another chance, my last. What had kept me from knowing this was crazy when I got into it?

"And if I'm caught?" I said. "If I tell the police about the Society when I'm caught?"

Jack lit another cigarette. "First," he said, ticking off his fingers, "it's an insane story. Second, if checked, there is absolutely nothing to link any of us to any of our—adventures. Third, although you may not know it, some of our members from other chapters are—well, let us say, very highly placed in law enforcement.

"And last, we don't really care. That is our perfect defense. Don't you see, the joy of the Work is in *not caring!* Not about reputation, love, loved ones lost"—his mouth twisted as he said the words, and I suddenly realized why there were no photographs on his walls—"but only about the essence of the Work, which is freedom."

I knew he was right, and I was feeling the same excitement as when he'd first approached me.

"But perhaps you're right," he said. "Perhaps you're not really ready for full membership in the Society. We can always let this whole thing drop, if you wish. . . ."

I saw a lifetime of boredom, exiled back to the inner wasteland that had driven me here in the first place. I saw success, and papers at academic conferences, and martinis at three o'clock in all their sterile regularity. The road—the very long road—rising to meet me.

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And "No," I said. "No. No. Look, I don't have many friends out here. But there's this secretary in my office, Sally something-or-other . . ."

"Won't do," he said. "Professional acquaintances are not, as we define 'close,' close."

I sighed and helped myself to some more of his brandy. No soda.

"All right," I said. "There's this girl, Nancy . . ."

I called her that night.

Since she trusted me, loved me, it was easier than Marcie. You have to be careful, they tell you, not to do it the same way twice. But there's this great ribs place—it used to be one of our favorite spots—about thirty miles north of town, overlooking the ocean. This time I didn't want the body found for a while, so I couldn't tell Jack Twelve where to look for positive ID. But I'd taken my Polaroid with flash attachment. That would do.

I'd been looking for a copy of David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus* for I don't know how long: it's out of print, you know. And as she climbed into my car she delightedly handed me a beaten-up paperback edition that she had hunted down in a used bookstore. For me.

That may be why I'm writing this. I do understand the principles of the Work, but I think Jack Twelve may have been right. I don't have the strength or whatever it is to measure up to the Founder.

Jack received the pictures registered mail, and called to tell me that he had. But in three weeks he hasn't called me—I *know* there must have been a meeting I wasn't invited to—and he doesn't return my calls. And for the last few days my calls have been more and more insistent, more and more panicked.

Why doesn't he call? I know why, and I know what comes next. You see, now, after—after Nancy, I can't survive without them.

I've taken her picture off my wall.

No, I can't survive without them, and they want me to learn that. Oh, they'll call eventually, and I'll run to rejoin the company and rebegin the Work.

Or rather, I won't.

Because now that I know what they know—that they've got me—I also know what comes next. One more proof that I'm worthy of full membership. One more close friend, before I can begin my random Opportunities. And I'd give it to them. I'd have to. And I know who it would have to be. I said I didn't have many friends. But it's too unfair; and there's a simpler way.

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In the eighteenth century someone was randomly slaughtering cats, in the grisliest of ways, in London. When Dr. Samuel Johnson heard of it, he expressed outrage and loathing for the carnage and then, stroking his own cat, said, "But they won't get Hodge. No, they won't get Hodge."

The pills and the Scotch bottle are waiting for me. Once more through the Sixth Brandenberg Concerto, and then I'll lock myself in the bedroom for my last—I'm guaranteed—nightcap. I have a class scheduled for tomorrow, so by late afternoon the landlady or somebody should find me, and find this. The day after tomorrow at the latest.

I never did bring myself to start *A Voyage to Arcturus.*

I've put out enough dry food and water for Mr. Chow to last him through the weekend. Make sure he finds a nice home. Don't let them put him to sleep.

DETECTIVERSE

MOTHER GOOSE NURSERY CRIMES I
Hey Diddle Diddle
by GLORIA ROSENTHAL

Hey diddle diddle,
The cat and the fiddle,
The cow jumped over the moon;
The dish is at large
On a kidnapping charge,
Since he ran away with the spoon.

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a ***NEW*** short story by

GEORGE BAXT

Said Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers *of one of our most valued contributors: "George Baxt exploded across the skies of mystery fiction like a particularly bright meteor in 1966." Prior to that auspicious debut, Mr. Baxt had been a playwright and screen writer, vocations to which he has returned many times over the years, while continuing to write his hilarious, inventive mysteries. . . .*

SECRETS CAN BE DANGEROUS TO YOUR HEALTH

by GEORGE BAXT

I guess it's true when they say there's one in every family, thought Agnes Clayton as she sat on her daughter Jane's bed, watching Jane agonizing at her dressing table. Jane was staring at her unattractive self in the mirror.

"Why me?" she wailed. "Why wasn't it Doreen or Mimi?" Her older sisters weren't exactly knockouts either, but at least their skin wasn't pimply and mottled, they didn't have their late father's dull grey eyes, or a head of corn-tassel hair that would be more appropriate on a scarecrow.

Plain Jane, thought Agnes. No looks, but she had the brains. Agnes said, "You're smarter than the two of them put together."

"I don't want to be smart. I want to be beautiful and sexy and have men throw themselves at my feet. I want to be worshiped, not ignored."

"We'll go to your Aunt Hattie's and see what she can do for you."

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Hattie's Salon of Beauty was one of the most heavily patronized beauty parlors in Crestfallen, Nebraska. Hattie Simmons was Agnes's sister-in-law. Hattie was not strong in the looks department either, but in her early teens learned how to use cosmetics as a means of physical improvement, how to dress to best emphasize her few assets, and by the time she went into the marketplace to find herself a husband, was described by most people as "interesting-looking." Now in her mid-forties and gaily widowed (as was Agnes), Hattie made a lot of money, invested it wisely, had several suitors, and was a role model for her many middle-aged patrons.

Now Hattie was staring at her niece, the child of misfortune, wondering if there was a space available in an expedition to climb Mount Everest, a prospect more appetizing than attempting to transform her drab niece into Cinderella. Jane sat in a barber's chair twining and untwining her fingers nervously, the pathetic appeal in her eyes, thought Hattie, enough to break the heart of an axe murderer. "Hmm," hmm'd Hattie.

Agnes stood with her arms folded and asked anxiously, "What do you think?"

Hattie hmm'd again and then slowly started circling the chair, studying Jane, who was biting her lower lip. "Stop biting your lip," cautioned Hattie, "it makes your face look blotchier." And to think Jane had been such a cute little baby. Who was the evil witch that had cursed her somewhere on the road from the cradle to puberty? Hattie sent for reinforcements. Her two most skilled beauticians, Ada and Morris, joined Hattie in circling Jane, wild Indians surrounding the wagon train.

"Well at least her bones are good," said Morris with a tinge of an Armenian accent, very rare in Crestfallen, Nebraska.

Agnes said proudly, "We come from a long line of good bones. My husband's family also had good bones. They were famous for their good bones."

Ada took Jane's chin and held it firmly, raising it for a better look at her face and the quality of the skin. "Bleach," she finally said.

"I think you're right," agreed Morris. Hattie moved in for a closer look and then nodded her head.

"Your formula twenty-seven?" Hattie asked Ada.

"Definitely," said Ada.

Jane began to whimper. "What's the matter?" asked Agnes.

"I don't want them to hurt me!"

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"Nobody's going to hurt you," said Ada smoothly. "It'll sting a little here and there, but it'll give your skin tone and quality and with the right makeup you'll look pretty good." She tactfully refrained from adding, "At least better than you look now."

Hattie said, "Jane, you'll have to lay off sweets. Your face is a garden of pimples."

"No more chocolate?" asked Jane meekly.

"No more anything," said Hattie solemnly.

Morris fingered a strand of Jane's hair. "This will need to be softened and tinted and curled."

"That hair will never curl," insisted Ada. "It's curl resistant." She too was feeling the hair. "Shredded sandpaper. Say, Agnes, you're not a bad looker. Where did this mess come from? Your husband's side?"

"Doug wasn't handsome at all, but he had very good bones, of course. I don't know what kind of hair he had because when I married him he was bald. And he had a lot of money."

Hattie told her assistants, "Jane's older sisters aren't too bad looking at all. Mimi, she's the oldest, she's been married three times. Doreen, the middle one, she's been married twice and cheats like hell."

"Please, Hattie," Agnes admonished.

"It's no state secret," said Hattie with a shrug.

Oh, to be married just once, thought Jane, let alone cheat. It wasn't easy being worldly in Crestfallen, Nebraska, but Mimi and Doreen were envied by most of the town's women, even the ones whose husbands and boyfriends had succumbed most willingly to Doreen's unfathomable allure.

Hattie clapped her hands together and got the attention she wanted. "Okay team, let's get to work. This is a challenge I have every intention of meeting. My niece Jane shall be my masterpiece! Let's begin with those awful warts on her neck."

The days flew by as three skilled pairs of hands went to work on their miserable subject. Jane groaned and grunted and griped as the six hands manipulated Crestfallen's own Galatea. Mimi and Doreen made a habit of dropping by Hattie's every day to see how Jane was progressing.

"You going to leave her hair that way, all stringy and icky?" asked Mimi.

Ada eyed her with contempt, as she indicated Jane with a pair of scissors and snapped, "This is a work in progress. We're not ready to invite the press and the public."

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Doreen said, "You got rid of the warts on her neck." She added with a sigh, "I kind of miss them."

"I don't," said her mother, "and if you plan to come by here every day with your snide remarks, we'd be just as happy if you stayed away. I think Jane is coming along beautifully. Look at how beautifully Hattie's trimmed her eyebrows."

Mimi said scornfully, "I never knew no dude to succumb to a pair of eyebrows."

Jane tried to stifle a sob, but lost the battle. Aunt Hattie patted her shoulder gently with sympathy. "Trust your Aunt Hattie," she said to Jane as her tongue shot out to lick a tear that had trickled down to her upper lip, "when we get through with you, you won't be no oil painting but you'll still be highly displayable."

Agnes Clayton had been a widow for over a decade now. When Douglas died, she devoted herself to the well-being of her three daughters. Financially comfortable, she felt no need to go out into the world and try to snare a second husband. She concentrated on seeing her daughters get the best education possible and learn to be polite to their elders. Doreen and Mimi married well immediately, though Mimi turned into an overachiever, and was now considering shedding her third husband. Doreen was a nymphomaniac (Agnes had looked it up in *Webster)* and thoroughly enjoyed the exertion. Jane was five years younger than Doreen ("Jane was a mistake," Agnes frequently explained, but not when Jane was within earshot, she hoped). Jane was always painfully shy, and Agnes wondered if Jane had blushed when the doctor delivered her.

But now, as Agnes watched Jane's miraculous transformation, there stirred within her feelings that had lain dormant for over a decade. Fires were rekindling inside her and she was wondering if perhaps Hattie, Ada, and Morris might be put to work giving her an external overhaul. And when they were finished, she was positive she'd leave Hattie's establishment feeling like a new man.

The ugly duckling didn't emerge as a swan, particularly, but what was unveiled a month after the initial treatments was a very pleasant-looking young woman. Her hair was now auburn, a shade very becoming to what was now her alabaster skin. The hair had been skillfully fashioned and shaped and given body and tone. The three artisans designed a makeup chart for Jane which she soon mastered, and Agnes's friends and neighbors showered Jane with sincere admiring compliments. Hattie said to Jane, " 'Now, voyager, set thou forth and sail.' Go out there and kill them, baby."

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And for the first time in months, Jane smiled.

Rufus Thurgood sat behind his Louis Quinze desk, studying Jane Clayton. She sat with her legs crossed, her handbag on the floor propped against her chair, wearing a suit selected for her by Aunt Hattie, and on her head, a matching pillbox hat. Rufus liked what he saw, what he sought in all women. Stylish simplicity, taste, and if she wasn't the greatest looker in the world, she was nothing to be ashamed of.

What Jane saw was a well-dressed businessman in his early fifties, brown-green eyes that she knew shielded many secrets, clean-shaven, a strong chin that in his youth must have survived many blows and would continue to survive future ones. The jaw line was set and determined, and his suit was definitely Savile Row. She knew this for a fact because Aunt Hattie had told her. Aunt Hattie had set up this appointment; she'd been the best friend of Thurgood's late wife. Mavis had been killed in a plane crash a few years ago. Since they had fostered no children, Rufus Thurgood lived alone in his sixty-seven-room mansion situated in the center of four hundred acres of land just a few miles outside of Crestfallen, Nebraska. He'd come a long way from a wooden shack with a tin roof located at the side of the railroad.

Rufus asked Jane, "Can you keep a secret?"

Jane's eyes widened with surprise at this question from a man she'd just met five minutes ago. "I don't know. I've never known any secrets."

"Really!" He was truly astounded and just as truly perplexed. "Not even when you were a child?" She shook her head. "Didn't your sisters tell you any secrets?"

"They never told me anything." Which was true. Mimi and Doreen had two things in common. One, they were sisters. Two, they couldn't stand Jane.

"Amazing. Am I right, this is the first time you've applied for a job?"

"I wouldn't be here now if Aunt Hattie hadn't asked you to see me."

"Yes, I dined with her Monday night, when I told her that my personal assistant, Laraine Goodhew, was killed in a car crash last Friday."

"How awful."

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"She'd been drinking something awful lately. Maybe I burdened her with too many secrets. She didn't seem unstable when I hired her. When you work for me you have to keep a lot of secrets. I'm sure your aunt's told you about my reputation. That I'm a man of mystery."

"I love a mystery."

"That was one of my favorite radio programs."

"What was?"

" 'I Love a Mystery.' You're too young to remember."

"But not too young to keep a secret."

He chuckled. "Smart girl." He slapped his thigh and winced. He never knew his own strength. "Yes, I'm a man of mystery."

"Hattie told me you do all sorts of mysterious things, like disappearing suddenly without a warning and staying away for days, sometimes weeks. . . ."

"Sometimes months. But you're not to worry."

"I'm very good at not worrying."

"I've never seen skin like yours before."

"Me either. Um, I was ill. It's been treated."

"Makes your hair look real interesting." He leaned forward. "That was a compliment, not sexual harassment. I don't like women to look too flashy. And on the other hand, I don't like them to look too plain. You look just right. Yes, I'm a man of mystery. I'm worth billions. I have interests all over the world and I'm planning some investments in outer space, but those are a secret. All my friends are powerful. Royalty, heads of state, that sort of stuff. If somebody crosses me or I get an urge, I can make governments topple." He said conspiratorially, "I helped design the end of communism in the U.S.S.R."

Jane asked eagerly, "Is that a secret?"

"Sort of, but not a powerful one. The CIA knows about it. But they'll never leak it. I've got too much on them." Then he added darkly, "The president better watch his step." He thought for a moment and then his face brightened. "I'm a Libra, what are you?"

"Me too! I'm also a Libra. With Gemini rising."

"Geminis are two-faced. My wife was a Gemini."

For some reason she didn't understand, Jane's right hand was trembling. Something had come over her in a sudden rush. She knew that her future fate was to be inextricably interwoven with that of Rufus Thurgood. She sensed that one day soon she would be the mistress of his vast and imposing estate.

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"A penny for your thoughts."
"They're worth more than that."
"Come on, tell me."
"I can't. It's a secret." And he was hooked.

"How did you do it?" cried Agnes Clayton several months later when Jane flashed her two-hundred-and-fifty-carat diamond engagement ring. "How did you snare Rufus Thurgood?"
"Can't tell you. It's a secret."
"You didn't . . ."
"No, Mother, I'm still a virgin."
"Have you told your Aunt Hattie?"
"Yes. She said something about a finder's fee."
Said Agnes, "Hattie's always joking."
"She sounded serious to me."
"So when's the wedding?"
"Four weeks from today."
"Where are you honeymooning?"
"It's a secret."

Rufus Thurgood invited Agnes and her other daughters and their husbands, along with Hattie, and, at Jane's request, Ada and Morris, to a dinner at his mansion, which was called Arcane House. The assemblage of butlers, maids, footmen, and kitchen staff was overwhelmingly impressive. Jane took her family and friends on a tour of the house while Rufus secreted himself behind locked doors in his office to take an important call from Saudi Arabia.

Jane was in her element and blossomed. Her sisters looked as though they might at any moment expire from envy. The husbands realized there was suffering ahead because they could never surround their wives with such opulence. The ladies gasped when Jane took them into her private suite. It had been the first Mrs. Thurgood's, but Jane had had it completely redesigned and redecorated with the help of a corps of internationally famous interior designers. Agnes hungered for a touch of chintz but kept her silence. Ada whispered to Morris, "Can you imagine? We did it, we did all this. Jane owes us a lot of thanks." Morris's look was enigmatic, typical of a certain breed of Armenian.

Agnes said to Hattie after dinner, "I don't much like Armenians."
"Why? You once ate a bad one?"

Rufus signed a premarital agreement that gave Jane millions in her own right. Every day he shared fresh secrets with her so that

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she would be able to substitute for him successfully should he fall ill or die. It was understood immediately that she would be his sole heir and successor should he pre-decease her. Within six months after their marriage (they honeymooned, amusingly enough, at Niagara Falls), Jane was privy to almost every secret hidden behind her husband's strange eyes.

Jane wasn't in love with him. She had never been in love, and as Hattie said, "I don't think she'd recognize love if it came up behind her and nipped her rump." But she and Rufus enjoyed each other's company, and twice he broke his rule of no wives on business trips by taking her first to the outer reaches of Tibet and somebody's secret city and then, several months later, to the Antarctic zone and an under-ice city that was both dazzling and frightening with its ominous store of ultra-sophisticated atomic weapons. And to think, thought Jane, he came from the wrong side of the tracks in Crestfallen, Nebraska.

At home, Jane enjoyed the luxury of having Morris, and occasionally Ada, attend to her cosmetic needs every day of the week including Sundays. Ada once commented, "Jane, you're so secretive."

And Jane replied, "That comes with the territory."

Although Agnes and Hattie visited Jane occasionally, she and Rufus did no high-power entertaining. They opened the doors to Jane's family on Christmas day and lavished them with generous gifts, but New Year's Eve they spent alone consuming several bottles of incredibly vintage champagne, both brut and sec.

One day Agnes was having her hair done at Hattie's, Hattie seeing to her personally. "I don't know why Jane puts up with it."

"Puts up with what?"

"His disappearing acts. He's gone again. It's over three weeks now. Do you suppose he has a sailor complex? A girl in every port?"

"No, more than likely it's a bank in every port. That's what drove Mavis to drink . . . why Laraine Goodhew committed suicide."

Agnes was stunned. "She didn't!"

"She did. Drove her car off Lover's Leap. She was Rufus's mistress."

"She wasn't!"

"She was. Supposed to be a secret but Laraine blabbed one night to me when she was raging drunk. Rufus would have killed her if she hadn't beat him to it. If you're mixed up with Rufus Thurgood, you have to know how to keep a secret or out you go." She was teasing a tress when she looked over her shoulder to make sure no

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one was eavesdropping. Then she whispered in Agnes's ear, "There are them that suspect he arranged Mavis's plane crash."

"Oh God, no."

"Yes indeed."

"And you introduced Jane to that man!"

"So what? She's a very rich woman!"

"What good is rich if you're dead!"

That afternoon, in Jane's suite, Morris was applying a special base to a bruise on Jane's cheek. "You've been sporting a lot of these bruises lately. He beats you." She said nothing. "Answer me. I can't stand it. I'm in love with you."

"Hush. The rooms are bugged."

"Oh God. So that's why you're drinking so much." He sank his face into her dyed auburn hair and mumbled, "I never knew I could love anyone the way I love you. And I know you love me too."

"Careful. I never know when he'll be back from one of those damned trips of his." She studied her face in the dressing table mirror and fingered the bruise. "He belted me three weeks ago, the day he left."

"That's why you wouldn't let us come see you."

"It was very ugly. I was so ashamed. It's not so bad now. Morris, can you keep a secret?"

"Not the way you can."

"I can share this secret because it's mine. It doesn't belong to him. Morris, I hate Rufus. I wish I were shy and drab and mousey again like a rock singer. Oh Morris, Morris, what shall I do?"

The next day Rufus was back but advised Jane he'd be off again within the next three days. He didn't dare ask if she had missed him, because he knew the answer. Alone in his office he listened to his secret tapes and learned that Morris and Jane were in love. He sat in silence, contemplating this knowledge while drinking some Polish vodka from a case shipped to him by Lech Walesa. Then he went out to the garden and drank of the fresh night air. He was too disturbed to notice the absence of the guards who were usually on patrol day and night. He was too disturbed to hear the three hooded men sneaking up on him from behind. They overpowered him swiftly and silently and spirited him away.

Jane sat behind the locked doors of her suite sipping brandy. She said aloud, "Perhaps the next time he goes away, he won't come

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back." She fell onto the bed and hours later when the telephone rang, she had no idea she'd been asleep for three hours. She groped for the phone and said softly, "Yes?"

"Mrs. Thurgood?"

"Yes." Her heart was pounding. This was her private phone. Only a select few knew the number, and none of this select few would call her "Mrs. Thurgood."

"We have your husband. We want five million dollars in cash or we'll kill him. We'll let you know five hours from now how to get the money to us. The banks will be open then. Do not call the police! We warn you! Leave the police out of this. We know you have much more than five million in your private accounts. Do you hear me? Five million or Rufus Thurgood's throat will be slit. Do you understand?"

Jane was smiling. "Oh yes. I do understand. Five million or you'll slit his throat." The party at the other end hung up and Jane showered and dressed and packed a suitcase and ordered her chauffeur and car to drive her to the airport. At the airport, she dismissed her chauffeur, who was an amiable young man.

The chauffeur said, "Would you like me to tell your mother and your aunt where you're going?"

"I'm sorry, Irving, but it's a secret."

"When will you be back, ma'am?"

"It's a secret."

"Have a good trip."

"Thank you, Irving."

She watched him drive off. She crossed to a Lufthansa counter, bought a round-trip ticket to Liechtenstein, where much of her money was secreted, and then went to the bar and ordered a Bloody Mary. She thought of her mother and her sisters and her Aunt Hattie, to whom she owed so much. She thought of Morris with affection and then she thought of her husband, but not too kindly. She made a mental note that on her return from her secret trip, she must remember to replace the phone in her private suite on the receiver. She took a healthy swig of the Bloody Mary and felt warm and wonderful all over. The bartender, while drying a glass said, "Lady, you've got the most beautiful smile. What's it for?"

"Can't tell you," said Jane, as she reached for a bowl of peanuts. "It's a secret."

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

DONALD OLSON

For many years mystery writer Donald Olson lived next door to a beloved uncle named Holmes, on a street called Baker Street, in a house that dates from the Victorian era. Simply an odd coincidence? Not entirely, for although the uncle's name is Rudolph, not Sherlock, and the house is in Jamestown, New York, not London, Mr. Olson's uncle is passionately fond of the adventures of the immortal sleuth and imparted his enthusiasm to his nephew at an early age. So it was that Mr. Olson turned to mystery writing at the outset of his career, and has been producing some of the best stories in the genre ever since . . .

MY LIPS ARE SEALED

by DONALD OLSON

In early September, three months after his murder, the disposal by public auction of Cyril MacEvoy's worldly goods took place at his estate on Salisbury Road. The day was clear and crisp, an auctioneer's dream; by nine that morning, most of the folding chairs under the marquee on the south lawn were already occupied.

Paul Hollenbeck's tall figure could be seen moving among the prospective buyers and the merely curious as they milled around the rows of mostly antique furniture and household effects or roamed through the house examining those items yet to be carried outside. To anyone noticing him, Paul's interest might have seemed more casual than studious; his strong, clean-featured face certainly did not betray the shrewdly appraising look of a dealer as he paused beside a late-Empire sofa at one end of the spacious living room.

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"Wouldn't it be lovely in a moss-green velvet?" said a woman's voice behind Paul; looking around, he saw that she was speaking to him.

Although not a dealer, he replied in the dismissive tone of one who wished to dampen anyone else's interest. "Reupholstering a piece like this would be quite costly."

"Unless one did it oneself."

"You in the trade?" he asked.

"Antiques?" Her laughter was the merest tinkle. "No. You might say I dabble a little."

Paul studied the woman's face more closely than he'd examined the sofa. Was she planning to bid on it? Her dusty-grey eyes were as noncommittal as his own. She was one of those colorless women who seemingly make no effort to disguise their plainness while possessing a certain waiflike attractiveness as pleasing to the eye as mere beauty. Paul caught a breath of some subtle fragrance as she leaned forward to run a palm over the worn brocade fabric.

"No bloodstains—unlike the carpet."

Paul stiffened. "No what?"

She ducked her head. "Sorry. Tasteless of me. But don't you wonder how many of us are here out of morbid curiosity? The man who owned all this *was* murdered, you know."

"So I understand." And then, hoping it might be true—she seemed a mite too interested in the sofa—he said, "Is that what brought you? Curiosity?"

"Well, partly, I suppose. Is anyone immune? Of course there's the added mystery of an *unsolved* murder."

Paul affected a faint boredom with the subject. "Unsolved so far. I haven't heard of any recent developments, have you?"

"No, the police seem to have little to go on, from what I've read. No suspects, no murder weapon, no obvious motive. Most likely a robbery gone wrong. Plenty here to attract a thief."

Outside, the auctioneer could be heard on his microphone urging latecomers to get their bid numbers. Paul and the woman exchanged smiles. He said, "I guess I'll find a seat. Nice talking with you."

They drifted apart. Paul circled the marquee, found a chair at the rear, and sat down. The auction commenced. Pictures, silver, bibelots were knocked down at what Paul thought exorbitant prices. A murmur went through the crowd as the auctioneer was obliged to mention the bloodstains on a particularly fine Oriental. If anything, this gruesome detail seemed only to spur interest among the bidders.

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Paul sat up straight as the Empire sofa was lifted into view. "A charming piece, ladies and gentlemen. A bit of restoring and you'll have a real treasure."

Paul felt the sweat break out on his forehead as the bidding took off. Twice bids were raised by the woman he'd talked to, before Paul himself ventured to raise his hand. By now he realized how badly he'd underestimated the notoriety value bidders were placing on the murdered man's possessions. There was a limit beyond which he couldn't possibly afford to go. With a frustrating sense of failure, he made his final bid, knowing even before he saw the woman's hand go up that she would top it. The gavel descended and it was all over.

Paul tried to decide what to do. That he should simply give up was unthinkable. For three months, the blade of panic had hung over him like a headsman's axe.

He saw no point in remaining longer; neither, apparently, did his successful rival, for as he made his way toward the cars, he saw the woman standing beside the sofa in the area to which the auctioneer's men had removed it. Forcing a smile, Paul went up to her.

"Congratulations," he said, in as light a tone as he could muster.

"Bad man," she said with a playful grimace. "You made me pay three times what this thing is worth."

"Then why did you?"

She sighed. "Auction fever, I guess. Did you really want it that badly?"

"Not at that price. I'm afraid I got carried away, too."

She looked around with a distracted air. "Problem now is getting it home."

"I have a station wagon," Paul said.

She regarded him with a hesitant smile. "Oh, but you wouldn't—"

"Why not? I've nothing better to do at the moment."

"The loser isn't supposed to be chivalrous."

"Stay here. I'll get the wagon."

Together they loaded the sofa. The woman got in her small car and Paul followed her, still with no clear idea how to turn this piece of luck to his advantage, yet knowing he was closer to solving his problem now than when the sofa had remained out of reach in that guarded mansion on Salisbury Road.

He felt that destiny was still smiling upon him as he followed the other car into Lantern Lane, a short residential street bordering the park, where the woman turned into the driveway of a big brick house with a wooded lot on one side and what appeared to be a

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vacant house for sale on the other. If burglary were necessary . . .

They carried the sofa through the front door, across a hall into an already overfurnished living room.

The woman thanked Paul effusively. "Whatever would I have done without you?"

"Called a hauler, I suppose."

"I don't know any. I'm still a newcomer in town. Now, I insist you accept a cup of coffee for your trouble. And I want to pay you, of course."

"Nonsense. It was no trouble at all. Coffee sounds good, though."

Something in her manner, a sort of awkward busyness about her fingers and a tendency to fuss too much as she served the coffee, led Paul to suspect that playing the hostess was not an everyday role. He felt it incumbent upon him to put her at ease. He admired the room. Although comfortable, it had a certain faded quality, as if nothing had been changed in years. This was explained as he learned that the woman, whose name was Janelle Scott, had been a widow for five years and had moved to Corydon only a month earlier after inheriting the house from a maiden aunt.

"As you see, Aunt Helen had a few good pieces. I thought I might use them as a starting point and redo the house in antiques. Once it's re-covered, the sofa might look good there in front of the fireplace."

"Moss-green velvet."

"Yes. I thought I might tackle it myself. It'll be a conversation piece, at least. Though I certainly wouldn't have wanted that blood-stained Oriental in my house."

"I agree."

She refilled his cup. Paul got the feeling she was in no hurry for him to leave. She said, "Did you know anything about him? Cyril MacEvoy?"

Paul hesitated, saw no reason to lie. "Not really. He was an investment broker. I'm an accountant. I worked for someone who had dealings with him."

"Was he a nice man?"

"Nice?" Paul smiled. "His public image was unstained, so far as I know."

"I guess I'd feel better if he were a crook or a wife-beater or something awful, you know. One doesn't like to think of nice people getting murdered." She looked across at the sofa. "I'll feel better when it's re-covered, bloodstains or no bloodstains."

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Paul said casually: "I've worked on a couple of antique pieces. Maybe I could help you. If you're not planning to tackle it right away."

"Oh, Paul, you *are* kind. And, no, I won't do anything with it until I've found the right fabric."

He finished his coffee. There seemed nothing further to be gained by lingering. Janelle Scott thanked him again as he was leaving. At the door he astonished himself by saying without conscious forethought, "I wonder . . . would you have dinner with me some evening?"

Her goodbye smile faded into a look of dismay. "Oh, well . . ."

"Sorry. Didn't mean to embarrass you. I only thought, your not knowing many people in town yet, you might . . ."

His sudden diffidence appeared to reassure her. "Don't ask me why, I simply assumed you must be married."

"I was. My wife died."

"I'm sorry. Dinner would be fine. Thank you."

"Tomorrow night? I could pick you up about seven."

"I'll be ready. Goodbye, Paul. Thanks for everything. I could use a friend right now."

Paul tried to convince himself that he'd had no other purpose in inviting her to dinner than to get close to her and gain her confidence, even if it required a string of dinner engagements before the opportunity might arise to do what had to be done to restore his peace of mind. Yet, remembering her face and the sound of her voice, he knew this wasn't altogether true. Janelle Scott seemed to possess some indefinable quality that he'd found in no other woman since Meg, not that he'd been close to any other woman since her death.

Perhaps what he really wanted to do was to tell her the truth. The possibility intrigued him. Would it be foolishly unwise? A dangerous risk? One not to be taken too soon, of course, but assuming a relationship developed, an eventuality not inconceivable if he'd read the signals correctly. There had been nothing coy or flirtatious in Janelle Scott's manner, yet there had been unmistakably something, something unspoken.

If he were to take the risk, would she believe what Paul was certain the police would not? That Cyril MacEvoy's death was not murder, but an accident? If he were to tell her the whole story of how he'd uncovered a hint of something dubious in the financier's flashy promises to one of Paul's clients, who had invested most of

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his life savings in MacEvoy's so-called "Security Senior's Trust." The evidence was shaky; MacEvoy was a canny and experienced money manipulator. Probing discreetly so as not to spook the man, Paul had eventually acquired sufficient data to warrant a confrontation.

With glib plausibility, MacEvoy had denied Paul's allegations. Paul had probed more deeply into MacEvoy's personal background, and in their second meeting in MacEvoy's office the broker's manner had been more conciliatory but no less evasive. Paul had agreed to meet with him in his Salisbury Road home that evening.

There MacEvoy had been fulsomely cordial, but even before he'd offered Paul a drink the younger man had read MacEvoy's mind, knew that the offer of a bribe would be forthcoming, a bribe Paul had rejected with angry contempt.

What happened next had caught Paul totally unprepared. Turning with a drink in his hand, he'd looked straight into the barrel of a small-caliber gun.

"You're a fool, Hollenbeck," MacEvoy had jeered. "I could have made you rich. No, don't get up. Don't move. I've already tripped the silent alarm. Police will be here in minutes. I'll tell them you broke in, threatened me."

Later, Paul could hardly recollect the precise sequence of events. Only the panic, the sudden flash of his arm as he'd flung his glass into MacEvoy's face and lunged for him. They'd struggled. MacEvoy dropped the gun. Paul picked it up, pointed it at MacEvoy's chest, and fired once as the older man leaped for him.

Had Paul been thinking clearly, he might have wiped the gun clean of his prints and dropped it beside the body. But when he heard the siren's wail his first thought was to get rid of that gun. The antique sofa on which he'd been sitting was almost identical to one his grandmother had owned. Paul had often hidden his treasures down between the box frame of the seat and the fabric covering the back. Now, almost by instinct, he'd quickly shoved the small gun down into this cavity and fled from the house.

Afterward, he'd tried to persuade himself the gun might never be found—until he'd learned of the impending auction. Suppose someone were to buy the sofa, remove the worn upholstery, and discover the gun. The gun bearing his prints, prints he knew were on record because he'd once been bonded when working for a bank.

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Dressed in black, with hardly more than a trace of makeup and her mousey hair done in a more becoming style, Janelle Scott was really quite attractive in the dim light of the restaurant with its view of the harbor at sunset through tall, softly blue-tinted windows. The pleasant atmosphere did nothing at first, however, to ease the air of constraint between them as they exchanged the usual polite banalities.

Drinks helped. Janelle began talking about her husband. "He was headmaster of a school. One can't imagine a safer occupation, right? One day he was accompanying the school hockey team to one of its games. The bus went off the road in a blizzard. Dwight and two of the boys were killed."

"God, how awful for you."

"Dwight was my whole life. My whole *life,* you see. I had no one else. I simply fell apart. I was consumed by a kind of—of hatred for everything. God's injustice most of all. I began doing—foolish things. Anything to forget. I couldn't bear to stay in the same town. I kept moving around, but wherever I went I seemed to be pursued by a guilt I couldn't escape. You see, Dwight and I had had one of those trivial, inane quarrels the morning he went off on that bus."

She sipped her drink and stared out across the harbor, streaked now with rays of the setting sun. When Paul looked into her eyes it was like gazing into shadows.

"Enough about me," she said. "Tell me about yourself, Paul."

There comes, occasionally, a moment of recognition between strangers, the chance discovery of having shared a common emotional experience and been affected by it in the same way. Perceptions change, become instantly more acute. Aware of this happening, Paul lost his customary reticence and found himself telling her about Meg.

"She began tiring easily. We didn't think it could be anything serious. Anemia perhaps. She had tests. It was leukemia. Two months later she was dead."

Janelle looked away from the pain in his eyes. "I wonder if it's different for a man."

"Different?"

"Going on, I mean, afterward. Life goes on but I haven't. Not inside."

"If going on means going out," he replied, "I've not done that since Meg died. This is the first time I've been, well, *out* with a woman since then."

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"I'd call that a tribute to your wife, and flattering to me. But why me? Why now?"

He thought about it. "Something about you reminds me of Meg."

"Funny," she said. "Something in your manner reminded me of Dwight."

"Deceived by appearances," he said lightly.

"No danger. It won't ever happen to me again, that special magic."

"I know people to whom it has," he replied.

"Ah, but I wonder, could it have been that special the first time?"

A bleakness in her expression filled him with shame. He felt suddenly like the most contemptible of frauds, and yielding to an impulse as ungovernable as inviting her to dinner, Paul found himself telling her the truth about his involvement in Cyril MacEvoy's death.

When he'd finished speaking he found it impossible to gauge the effect of his words. The shadows seemed to deepen in her eyes. With a sickening aftershock at his own rashness, he realized that he'd delivered his whole future into the hands of a virtual stranger.

"That's the story, Janelle. You're free to do what you wish with the information."

In a very small voice, she said: "I think you'd better take me home, Paul."

He felt no regret at having spoken. He knew he could not have lived indefinitely in the shade of guilt, that if he hadn't confessed to Janelle he would eventually have gone to the police, which by the morning of the third day, when he still hadn't heard from her, he was sure she herself must have done. A woman like that, how could she do anything else?

He could bear the suspense no longer, and that afternoon he left work early and drove to the house in Lantern Lane.

Moments passed after he'd rung the bell before the door was opened. But not by Janelle Scott. This was a much older woman who regarded Paul with guarded eyes.

"I'm looking for Janelle—for Mrs. Scott," he said.

The corner of her prim little mouth jerked down. "Isn't everyone? Who are you?"

"Paul Hollenbeck."

"I'm Helen Pickering. Janelle's aunt. You'd better come in."

In the hall, she eyed him with a sharply inquisitive look. "From the police, are you?"

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"Good Lord, no. Has something happened to Mrs. Scott?"

"If you're not from the police, what exactly is your interest in my niece?"

"Miss Pickering, Janelle told me you were dead."

This didn't faze the woman. "Hmpff. Wishful thinking. As you can see, I'm quite alive, thank you."

"But why would she tell me that?" Paul explained how he and Janelle had happened to meet.

Apparently satisfied that Paul's utter dismay was genuine, the woman's manner softened. "Against my better judgment I agreed to let Janelle come up and housesit for me while I was off on a tour with friends for a month. I should have had my head examined. Janelle's been unstable ever since that no-good husband of hers did a bunk. I've been more than generous with the girl, but I told her there would be no more checks. Ever. Not after some of the stunts she's pulled. I suppose this was her way of punishing me."

"I don't understand." Paul couldn't believe they were talking about the same woman.

Miss Pickering waved a hand toward the living room. "I suppose I should consider myself lucky. Only a couple of my pieces are missing."

Paul felt a tightness in his chest. "The sofa . . ."

"If there was an antique sofa, that's gone too. She's pulled that stunt before, in more than one town. Buys antiques at auctions with bum checks, then quickly sells them to a dealer and does a skip."

Paul was aghast. "You've called the police?"

"Not I. But I thought they might have got onto her. I won't do anything about it. Rather glad it happened, if the truth be told. I'm off the hook as far as feeling any further obligation to that one."

"Janelle told me her husband was killed in a bus accident."

Miss Pickering uttered a ruthless chuckle. "Dwight? He was on a bus, all right. Hopped a bus out of town and never came back. Instead of thanking her lucky stars, Janelle cracked up. Went off on her own little guilt trip. Blamed herself. That's when she started doing these nutty things."

It was all too bizarre for Paul's reeling mind to grasp. He left the house in Lantern Lane and drove aimlessly through the streets with a heavy heart and a brain that refused to believe what he'd been told. He'd trusted Janelle and he'd trusted his own feelings. How could he have been so wrong?

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That Janelle was hardly in a position to reveal his own secret was of no comfort whatsoever.

The package arrived in the mail about a week later, postmarked from some town in the Deep South Paul had never heard of. A brief note was enclosed with the gun:

Dear Paul, My lips are sealed. Thank you for that lovely evening, even if it was too good to be true. Janelle.

Paul tossed the note aside and stared dumbly at the gun without that upsurge of relief he ought by rights to have felt. He was safe at last, but it no longer mattered. He felt, if anything, a sense of betrayal and loss, a loss almost as painful as when Meg had died.

Presently, he picked up the gun, found without undue surprise that it was still loaded. Holding it in his hand he went into the bedroom and shut the door.

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ELMORE LEONARD

To continue our tradition of publishing the world's leading crime writers, we wanted to present the work of Elmore Leonard, but to do so, we had to borrow from another genre. Although Mr. Leonard began his career writing short stories, his time is now devoted to longer fiction, and most of those early stories are westerns, though many, like this one, are also classics of suspense . . .

THREE-TEN TO YUMA

by ELMORE LEONARD

He had picked up his prisoner at Fort Huachuca shortly after midnight and now, in a silent early morning mist, they approached Contention. The two riders moved slowly, one behind the other.

Entering Stockman Street, Paul Scallen glanced back at the open country with the wet haze blanketing its flatness, thinking of the long night ride from Huachuca, relieved that this much was over. When his body turned again, his hand moved over the sawed-off shotgun that was across his lap and he kept his eyes on the man ahead of him until they were near the end of the second block, opposite the side entrance of the Republic Hotel.

He said just above a whisper, though it was clear in the silence, "End of the line."

The man turned in his saddle, looking at Scallen curiously, "The jail's around on Commercial."

"I want you to be comfortable."

Scallen stepped out of the saddle, lifting a Winchester from the boot, and walked toward the hotel's side door. A figure stood in the

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gloom of the doorway, behind the screen, and as Scallen reached the steps the screen door opened.

"Are you the marshal?"

"Yes, sir." Scallen's voice was soft and without emotion. "Deputy, from Bisbee."

"We're ready for you. Two-oh-seven. A corner . . . fronts on Commercial." He sounded proud of the accommodation.

"You're Mr. Timpey?"

The man in the doorway looked surprised. "Yeah, Wells Fargo. Who'd you expect?"

"You might have got a back room, Mr. Timpey. One with no windows." He swung the shotgun on the man still mounted. "Step down easy, Jim."

The man, who was in his early twenties, a few years younger than Scallen, sat with one hand over the other on the saddle horn. Now he gripped the horn and swung down. When he was on the ground his hands were still close together, iron manacles holding them three chain lengths apart. Scallen motioned him toward the door with the stubby barrel of the shotgun.

"Anyone in the lobby?"

"The desk clerk," Timpey answered him, "and a man in a chair by the front door."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know. He's asleep . . . got his brim down over his eyes."

"Did you see anyone out on Commercial?"

"No . . . I haven't been out there." At first he had seemed nervous, but now he was irritated, and a frown made his face pout childishly.

Scallen said calmly, "Mr. Timpey, it was your line this man robbed. You want to see him go all the way to Yuma, don't you?"

"Certainly I do." His eyes went to the outlaw, Jim Kidd, then back to Scallen hurriedly. "But why all the melodrama? The man's under arrest—already been sentenced."

"But he's not in jail till he walks through the gates at Yuma," Scallen said. "I'm only one man, Mr. Timpey, and I've got to get him there."

"Well, dammit . . . I'm not the law! Why didn't you bring men with you? All I know is I got a wire from our Bisbee office to get a hotel room and meet you here in the morning of November third. There weren't any instructions that I had to get myself deputized a marshal. That's your job."

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"I know it is, Mr. Timpey," Scallen said, and smiled, though it was an effort. "But I want to make sure no one knows Jim Kidd's in Contention until after train time this afternoon."

Jim Kidd had been looking from one to the other with a faintly amused grin. Now he said to Timpey, "He means he's afraid somebody's going to jump him." He smiled at Scallen. "That marshal must've really sold you a bill of goods."

"What's he talking about?" Timpey said.

Kidd went on before Scallen could answer. "They hid me in the Huachuca lockup 'cause they knew nobody could get at me there . . . and finally the Bisbee marshal gets a plan. He and some others hopped the train in Benson last night, heading for Yuma with an army prisoner passed off as me." Kidd laughed, as if the idea were ridiculous.

"Is that right?" Timpey said.

Scallen nodded. "Pretty much right."

"How does he know all about it?"

"He's got ears and ten fingers to add with."

"I don't like it. Why just one man?"

"Every deputy from here down to Bisbee is out trying to scare up the rest of them. Jim here's the only one we caught," Scallen explained—then added, "Alive."

Timpey shot a glance at the outlaw. "Is he the one who killed Dick Moons?"

"One of the passengers swears he saw who did it . . . and he didn't identify Kidd at the trial."

Timpey shook his head. "Dick drove for us a long time. You know his brother lives here in Contention. When he heard about it he almost went crazy." He hesitated, and then said again, "I don't like it."

Scallen felt his patience wearing away, but he kept his voice even when he said, "Maybe I don't either . . . but what you like and what I like aren't going to matter a whole lot, with the marshal past Tucson by now. You can grumble about it all you want, Mr. Timpey, as long as you keep it under your breath. Jim's got friends . . . and since I have to haul him clear across this territory, I'd just as soon they didn't know about it."

Timpey fidgeted nervously. "I don't see why I have to get dragged into this. My job's got nothing to do with law enforcement. . . ."

"You have the room key?"

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"In the door. All I'm responsible for is the stage run between here and Tucson—"

Scallen shoved the Winchester at him. "If you'll take care of this and the horses till I get back, I'll be obliged to you . . . and I know I don't have to ask you not to mention we're at the hotel."

He waved the shotgun and nodded and Jim Kidd went ahead of him through the side door into the hotel lobby. Scallen was a stride behind him, holding the stubby shotgun close to his leg. "Up the stairs on the right, Jim."

Kidd started up, but Scallen paused to glance at the figure in the armchair near the front. He was sitting on his spine with limp hands folded on his stomach and, as Timpey had described, his hat low over the upper part of his face. You've seen people sleeping in hotel lobbies before, Scallen told himself, and followed Kidd up the stairs. He couldn't stand and wonder about it.

Room 207 was narrow and high-ceilinged, with a single window looking down on Commercial Street. An iron bed was placed the long way against one wall and extended to the right side of the window, and along the opposite wall was a dresser with wash basin and pitcher and next to it a rough-board wardrobe. An unpainted table and two straight chairs took up most of the remaining space.

"Lay down on the bed if you want to," Scallen said.

"Why don't you sleep?" Kidd asked. "I'll hold the shotgun."

The deputy moved one of the straight chairs near to the door and the other to the side of the table opposite the bed. Then he sat down, resting the shotgun on the table so that it pointed directly at Jim Kidd sitting on the edge of the bed near the window.

He gazed vacantly outside. A patch of dismal sky showed above the frame buildings across the way, but he was not sitting close enough to look directly down onto the street. He said, indifferently, "I think it's going to rain."

There was a silence, and then Scallen said, "Jim, I don't have anything against you personally . . . this is what I get paid for, but I just want it understood that if you start across the seven feet between us, I'm going to pull both triggers at once—without first asking you to stop. That clear?"

Kidd looked at the deputy marshal, then his eyes drifted out the window again. "It's kinda cold, too." He rubbed his hands together and the three chain links rattled against each other. "The window's open a crack. Can I close it?"

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Scallen's grip tightened on the shotgun and he brought the barrel up, though he wasn't aware of it. "If you can reach it from where you're sitting."

Kidd looked at the window sill and said without reaching toward it, "Too far."

"All right," Scallen said, rising. "Lay back on the bed." He worked his gun belt around so that now the Colt was on his left hip.

Kidd went back slowly, smiling. "You don't take any chances, do you? Where's your sporting blood?"

"Down in Bisbee with my wife and three youngsters," Scallen told him without smiling, and moved around the table.

There were no grips on the window frame. Standing with his side to the window, facing the man on the bed, he put the heel of his hand on the bottom ledge of the frame and shoved down hard. The window banged shut and with the slam he saw Jim Kidd kicking up off of his back, his body straining to rise without his hands to help. Momentarily, Scallen hesitated and his finger tensed on the triggers. Kidd's feet were on the floor, his body swinging up and his head down to lunge from the bed. Scallen took one step and brought his knee up hard against Kidd's face.

The outlaw went back across the bed, his head striking the wall. He lay there with his eyes open looking at Scallen.

"Feel better now, Jim?"

Kidd brought his hands up to his mouth, working the jaw around. "Well, I had to try you out," he said. "I didn't think you'd shoot."

"But you know I will the next time."

For a few minutes Kidd remained motionless. Then he began to pull himself straight. "I just want to sit up."

Behind the table, Scallen said, "Help yourself." He watched Kidd stare out the window.

Then, "How much do you make, Marshal?" Kidd asked the question abruptly.

"I don't think it's any of your business."

"What difference does it make?"

Scallen hesitated. "A hundred and fifty a month," he said, finally, "some expenses, and a dollar bounty for every arrest against a Bisbee ordinance in the town limits."

Kidd shook his head sympathetically. "And you got a wife and three kids."

"Well, it's more than a cowhand makes."

"But you're not a cowhand."

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"I've worked my share of beef."

"Forty a month and keep, huh?" Kidd laughed.

"That's right, forty a month," Scallen said. He felt awkward. "How much do you make?"

Kidd grinned. When he smiled he looked very young, hardly out of his teens. "Name a month," he said. "It varies."

"But you've made a lot of money."

"Enough. I can buy what I want."

"What are you going to be wanting the next five years?"

"You're pretty sure we're going to Yuma."

"And you're pretty sure we're not," Scallen said. "Well, I've got two train passes and a shotgun that says we are. What've you got?"

Kidd smiled. "You'll see." Then he said right after it, his tone changing. "What made you join the law?"

"The money," Scallen answered, and felt foolish as he said it. But he went on, "I was working for a spread over by the Pantano Wash when Old Nana broke loose and raised hell up the Santa Rosa Valley. The army was going around in circles, so the Pima County marshal got up a bunch to help out and we tracked Apaches almost all spring. The marshal and I got along fine, so he offered me a deputy job if I wanted it." He wanted to say that he had started for seventy-five and worked up to the one hundred and fifty, but he didn't.

"And then someday you'll get to be marshal and make two hundred."

"Maybe."

"And then one night a drunk cowhand you've never seen will be tearing up somebody's saloon and you'll go in to arrest him and he'll drill you with a lucky shot before you get your gun out."

"So you're telling me I'm crazy."

"If you don't already know it."

Scallen took his hand off the shotgun and pulled tobacco and paper from his shirt pocket and began rolling a cigarette. "Have you figured out yet what my price is?"

Kidd looked startled, momentarily, but the grin returned. "No, I haven't. Maybe you come higher than I thought."

Scallen scratched a match across the table, lighted the cigarette, then threw it to the floor, between Kidd's boots. "You don't have enough money, Jim."

Kidd shrugged, then reached down for the cigarette. "You've treated me pretty good. I just wanted to make it easy on you."

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The sun came into the room after a while. Weakly at first, cold and hazy. Then it warmed and brightened and cast an oblong patch of light between the bed and the table. The morning wore on slowly because there was nothing to do and each man sat restlessly thinking about somewhere else, though it was a restlessness within and it showed on neither of them.

The deputy rolled cigarettes for the outlaw and himself and most of the time they smoked in silence. Once Kidd asked him what time the train left. He told him shortly after three, but Kidd made no comment.

Scallen went to the window and looked out at the narrow rutted road that was Commercial Street. He pulled a watch from his vest pocket and looked at it. It was almost noon, yet there were few people about. He wondered about this and asked himself if it was unnaturally quiet for a Saturday noon in Contention . . . or if it were just his nerves. . . .

He studied the man standing under the wooden awning across the street, leaning idly against a support post with his thumbs hooked in his belt and his flat-crowned hat on the back of his head. There was something familiar about him. And each time Scallen had gone to the window—a few times during the past hour—the man had been there.

He glanced at Jim Kidd lying across the bed, then looked out the window in time to see another man moving up next to the one at the post. They stood together for the space of a minute before the second man turned a horse from the tie rail, swung up and rode off down the street.

The man at the post watched him go and tilted his hat against the sun glare. And then it registered. With the hat low on his forehead Scallen saw him again as he had that morning. The man lying in the armchair . . . as if asleep.

He saw his wife, then, and the three youngsters and he could almost feel the little girl sitting on his lap where she had climbed up to kiss him goodbye, and he had promised to bring her something from Tucson. He didn't know why they had come to him all of a sudden. And after he had put them out of his mind, since there was no room now, there was an upset feeling inside as if he had swallowed something that would not go down all the way. It made his heart beat a little faster.

Jim Kidd was smiling up at him. "Anybody I know?"

"I didn't think it showed."

"Like the sun going down."

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Scallen glanced at the man across the street and then to Jim Kidd. "Come here." He nodded to the window. "Tell me who your friend is over there."

Kidd half rose and leaned over looking out the window, then sat down again. "Charlie Prince."

"Somebody else just went for help."

"Charlie doesn't need help."

"How did you know you were going to be in Contention?"

"You told the Wells Fargo man I had friends . . . and about the posses chasing around in the hills. Figure it out for yourself. You could be looking out a window in Benson and seeing the same thing."

"They're not going to do you any good."

"I don't know any man who'd get himself killed for a hundred and fifty dollars." Kidd paused. "Especially a man with a wife and young ones. . . ."

Men rode to town in something less than an hour later. Scallen heard the horses coming up Commercial, and went to the window to see the six riders pull to a stop and range themselves in a line in the middle of the street facing the hotel. Charlie Prince stood behind them, leaning against the post.

Then he moved away from it, leisurely, and stepped down into the street. He walked between the horses and stopped in front of them just below the window. He cupped his hands to his mouth and shouted, *"Jim!"*

In the quiet street it was like a pistol shot.

Scallen looked at Kidd, seeing the smile that softened his face and was even in his eyes. Confidence. It was all over him. And even with the manacles on you would believe that it was Jim Kidd who was holding the shotgun.

"What do you want me to tell him?" Kidd said.

"Tell him you'll write every day."

Kidd laughed and went to the window, pushing it up by the top of the frame. It raised a few inches. Then he moved his hands under the window and it slid up all the way.

"Charlie, you go buy the boys a drink. We'll be down shortly."

"Are you all right?"

"Sure I'm all right."

Charlie Prince hesitated. "What if you don't come down? He could kill you and say you tried to break. . . . Jim you tell him what'll happen if we hear a gun go off."

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"He knows," Kidd said, and closed the window. He looked at Scallen standing motionless with the shotgun under his arm. "Your turn, Marshal."

"What do you expect me to say?"

"Something that makes sense. You said before I didn't mean a thing to you personally—what you're doing is just a job. Well, you figure out if it's worth getting killed for. All you have to do is throw your guns on the bed and let me walk out the door and you can go back to Bisbee and arrest all the drunks you want. Nobody's going to blame you with the odds stacked seven to one. You know your wife's not going to complain. . . ."

"You should have been a lawyer, Jim."

The smile began to fade from Kidd's face. "Come on—what's it going to be?"

The door rattled with three knocks in quick succession. Abruptly the room was silent. The two men looked at each other and now the smile disappeared from Kidd's face completely.

Scallen moved to the side of the door, tiptoeing in his high-heeled boots, then pointed his shotgun toward the bed. Kidd sat down.

"Who is it?"

For a moment there was no answer. Then he heard, "Timpey."

He glanced at Kidd who was watching him. "What do you want?"

"I've got a pot of coffee for you."

Scallen hesitated. "You alone?"

"Of course I am. Hurry up, it's hot!"

He drew the key from his coat pocket, then held the shotgun in the crook of his arm as he inserted the key with one hand and turned the knob with the other. The door opened—and slammed against him, knocking him back against the dresser. He went off balance, sliding into the wardrobe, going down on his hands and knees, and the shotgun clattered across the floor to the window. He saw Jim Kidd drop to the floor for the gun. . . .

"Hold it!"

A heavyset man stood in the doorway with a Colt pointing out past the thick bulge of his stomach. "Leave that shotgun where it is." Timpey stood next to him with the coffeepot in his hand. There was coffee down the front of his suit, on the door and on the flooring. He brushed at the front of his coat feebly, looking from Scallen to the man with the pistol.

"I couldn't help it, Marshal—he made me do it. He threatened to do something to me if I didn't."

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"Who is he?"

"Bob Moons . . . you know, Dick's brother. . . ."

The heavyset man glanced at Timpey angrily. "Shut your damn whining." His eyes went to Jim Kidd and held there. "You know who I am, don't you?"

Kidd looked uninterested. "You don't resemble anybody I know."

"You didn't have to know Dick to shoot him!"

"I didn't shoot that messenger."

Scallen got to his feet, looking at Timpey. "What the hell's wrong with you?"

"I couldn't help it. He forced me."

"How did he know we were here?"

"He came in this morning talking about Dick and I felt he needed some cheering up, so I told him Jim Kidd had been tried and was being taken to Yuma and was here in town . . . on his way. Bob didn't say anything and went out, and a little later he came back with the gun."

"You damn fool." Scallen shook his head wearily.

"Never mind all the talk." Moons kept the pistol on Kidd. "I would've found him sooner or later. This way, everybody gets saved a long train ride."

"You pull that trigger," Scallen said, "and you'll hang for murder."

"Like he did for killing Dick. . . ."

"A jury said he didn't do it." Scallen took a step toward the big man. "And I'm damned if I'm going to let you pass another sentence."

"You stay put or I'll pass sentence on you!"

Scallen moved a slow step nearer. "Hand me the gun, Bob."

"I'm warning you—get the hell out of the way and let me do what I came for."

"Bob, hand me the gun or I swear I'll beat you through that wall."

Scallen tensed to take another step, another slow one. He saw Moons's eyes dart from him to Kidd and in that instant he knew it would be his only chance. He lunged, swinging his coat aside with his hand and when the hand came up it was holding a Colt. All in one motion. The pistol went up and chopped an arc across Moons's head before the big man could bring his own gun around. His hat flew off as the barrel swiped his skull and he went back against the wall heavily, then sank to the floor.

Scallen wheeled to face the window, thumbing the hammer back. But Kidd was still sitting on the edge of the bed with the shotgun at his feet.

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The deputy relaxed, letting the hammer ease down. "You might have made it, that time."

Kidd shook his head. "I wouldn't have got off the bed." There was a note of surprise in his voice. "You know, you're pretty good. . . ."

At two-fifteen Scallen looked at his watch, then stood up, pushing the chair back. The shotgun was under his arms. In less than an hour they would leave the hotel, walk over Commercial to Stockman and then up Stockman to the station. Three blocks. He wanted to go all the way. He wanted to get Jim Kidd on that train . . . but he was afraid.

He was afraid of what he might do once they were on the street. Even now his breath was short and occasionally he would inhale and let the air out slowly to calm himself. And he kept asking himself if it was worth it.

People would be in the windows and the doors though you wouldn't see them. They'd have their own feelings and most of their hearts would be pounding . . . and they'd edge back of the door frames a little more. The man out on the street was something without a human nature or a personality of its own. He was on a stage. The street was another world.

Timpey sat on the chair in front of the door and next to him, squatting on the floor with his back against the wall, was Moons. Scallen had unloaded Moons's pistol and placed it in the pitcher behind him. Kidd was on the bed.

Most of the time he stared at Scallen. His face bore a puzzled expression, making his eyes frown, and sometimes he would cock his head as if studying the deputy from a different angle.

Scallen stepped to the window now. Charlie Prince and another man were under the awning. The others were not in sight.

"You haven't changed your mind?" Kidd asked him seriously.

Scallen shook his head.

"I don't understand you. You risk your neck to save my life, now you'll risk it again to send me to prison."

Scallen looked at Kidd and suddenly felt closer to him than any man he knew. "Don't ask me, Jim," he said, and sat down again.

After that he looked at his watch every few minutes.

At five minutes to three he walked to the door, motioning Timpey aside, and turned the key in the lock. "Let's go, Jim." When Kidd was next to him he prodded Moons with the gun barrel. "Over on the bed, mister, if I see or hear about you on the street before train time, you'll face an attempted murder charge." He motioned Kidd

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past him, then stepped into the hall and locked the door.

They went down the stairs and crossed the lobby to the front door, Scallen a stride behind with the shotgun barrel almost touching Kidd's back. Passing through the doorway he said as calmly as he could, "Turn left on Stockman and keep walking. No matter what you hear, keep walking."

As they stepped out into Commercial, Scallen glanced at the ramada where Charlie Prince had been standing, but now the saloon porch was an empty shadow. Near the corner, two horses stood under a sign that said Eat in red letters; and on the other side of Stockman the signs continued, lining the rutted main street to make it seem narrower. And beneath the signs, in the shadows, nothing moved. There was a whisper of wind along the ramadas. It whipped sand specks from the street and rattled them against clapboard, and the sound was hollow and lifeless. Somewhere a screen door banged, far away.

They passed the cafe, turning onto Stockman. Ahead, the deserted street narrowed with distance to a dead end at the rail station—a single-story building standing by itself, low and sprawling with most of the platform in shadow. The westbound was there, along the platform, but the engine and most of the cars were hidden by the station house. White steam lifted above the roof to be lost in the sun's glare.

They were almost to the platform when Kidd said over his shoulder, "Run like hell while you're still able."

"Where are they?"

Kidd grinned, because he knew Scallen was afraid. "How should I know?"

"Tell them to come out in the open!"

"Tell them yourself."

"Dammit, *tell* them!" Scallen clenched his jaw and jabbed the short barrel into Kidd's back. "I'm not fooling. If they don't come out, I'll kill you!"

Kidd felt the gun barrel hard against his spine and suddenly he shouted, "Charlie!"

It echoed in the street, but after there was only the silence. Kidd's eyes darted over the shadowed porches. "Dammit, Charlie—hold on!"

Scallen prodded him up the warped plank steps to the shade of the platform and suddenly he could feel them near. "Tell them again!"

"Don't shoot, Charlie!" Kidd screamed the words.

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From the other side of the station they heard the trainsman's call trailing off, ". . . Gila Bend. Sentinel, Yuma!"

The whistle sounded loud, wailing, as they passed into the shade of the platform, then out again to the naked glare of the open side. Scallen squinted, glancing toward the station office, but the train dispatcher was not in sight. Nor was anyone. "It's the mail car," he said to Kidd. "The second to last one." Steam hissed from the iron cylinder of the engine, clouding that end of the platform. "Hurry it up!" he snapped, pushing Kidd along.

Then, from behind, hurried footsteps sounded on the planking, and, as the hiss of steam died away—"Stand where you are!"

The locomotive's main rods strained back, rising like the legs of a grotesque grasshopper, and the wheels moved. The connecting rods stopped on an upward swing and couplings clanged down the line of cars.

"Throw the gun away, brother!"

Charlie Prince stood at the corner of the station house with a pistol in each hand. Then he moved around carefully between the two men and the train. "Throw it far away, and unhitch your belt," he said.

"Do what he says," Kidd said. "They've got you."

The others, six of them, were strung out in the dimness of the platform shed. Grim-faced, stubbles of beard, hat brims low. The man nearest Prince spat tobacco lazily.

Scallen knew fear at that moment as fear had never gripped him before; but he kept the shotgun hard against Kidd's spine. He said, just above a whisper, "Jim—I'll cut you in half!"

Kidd's body was stiff, his shoulders drawn up tightly. "Wait a minute. . ." he said. He held his palms out to Charlie Prince, though he could have been speaking to Scallen.

Suddenly Prince shouted, "Go down!"

There was a fraction of a moment of dead silence that seemed longer. Kidd hesitated. Scallen was looking at the gunman over Kidd's shoulder, seeing the two pistols. Then Kidd was gone, rolling on the planking, and the pistols were coming up, one ahead of the other. Without moving, Scallen squeezed both triggers of the scatter gun.

Charlie Prince was going down, holding his hands tight to his chest, as Scallen dropped the shotgun and swung around drawing his Colt. He fired hurriedly. *Wait for a target!* Words in his mind. He saw the men under the platform shed, three of them breaking for the station office, two going full length to the planks . . . one crouching, his pistol up. *That one! Get him quick!* Scallen aimed and squeezed the heavy revolver and the man went down. *Now get the hell out!*

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Charlie Prince was face down. Kidd was crawling, crawling frantically and coming to his feet when Scallen reached him. He grabbed Kidd by the collar savagely, pushing him on and dug the pistol into his back. "Run, damn you!"

Gunfire erupted from the shed and thudded into the wooden caboose as they ran past it. The train was moving slowly. Just in front of them a bullet smashed a window of the mail car. Someone screamed, "You'll hit Jim!" There was another shot, then it was too late. Scallen and Kidd leaped up on the car platform and were in the mail car as it rumbled past the end of the station platform.

Kidd was on the floor, stretched out along a row of mail sacks. He rubbed his shoulder awkwardly with his manacled hands and watched Scallen who stood against the wall next to the open door.

Kidd studied the deputy for some minutes. Finally he said, "You know, you really earn your hundred and a half."

Scallen heard him, though the iron rhythm of the train wheels and his breathing were loud in his temples. He felt as if all his strength had been sapped, but he couldn't help smiling at Jim Kidd. He was thinking pretty much the same thing.

ON OUR COVER

In 1992 Elmore Leonard was named Grandmaster of the Mystery Writers of America, the highest honor that organization bestows, an award presented to individuals who, "by a lifetime of achievement, have proved themselves pre-eminent in the craft of the mystery and dedicated to the advancement of the genre." Following close upon his receipt of the MWA Grandmaster's Edgar (with which he is pictured on our cover), Mr. Leonard became the first winner of the Hammett prize, founded by the International Association of Crime Writers to recognise literary excellence in the field of crime writing.

It is often believed that popular success came to Elmore Leonard late in his career, but in fact, his western short stories were garnering awards and movie contracts as early as the 1950s. There was, however, a rapid expansion of his following after 1968 when he switched from western to contemporary fiction, and since 1985 he has topped the bestseller lists. The quality of this author's prose, together with his unusual insight into American society and his knack for good storytelling should earn him a place there for years to come.

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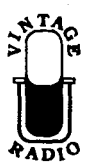

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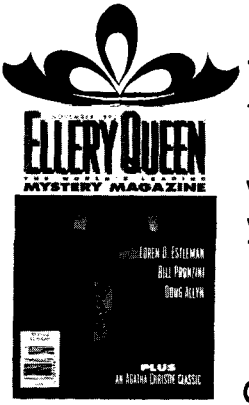

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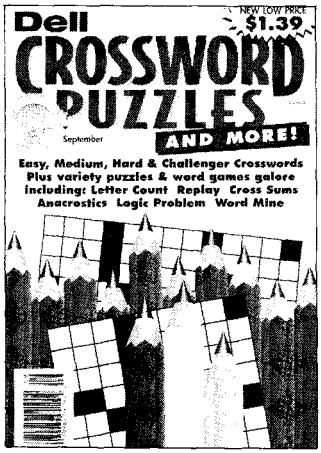

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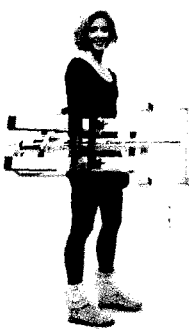

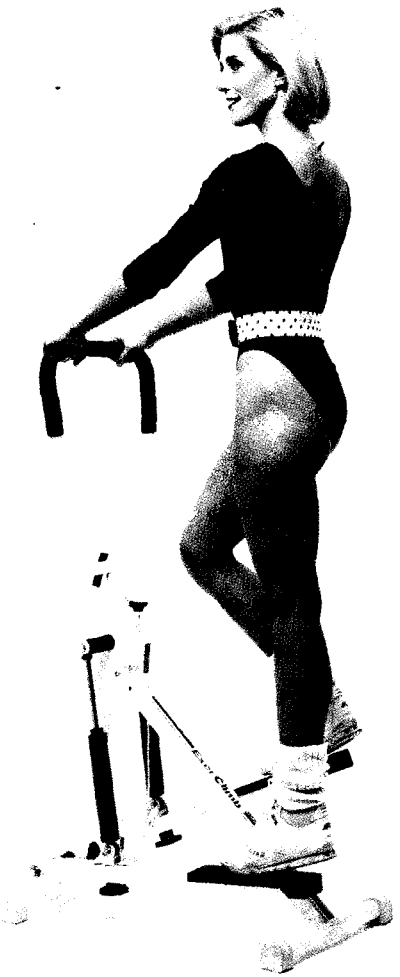

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